The Life and Work of Fionn Mac Colla: Determining a Gaelic Experience

Iain Macdonald, M.A. (Hons)

Scottish Literature
School of Critical Studies
College of Arts
University of Glasgow
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Portrait of a Young Scotsman, 1932 by Edward Baird (1904-1949)
Scottish National Portrait Gallery

Contents

Abstract

This thesis is the first extensive consideration of the life and work of Fionn Mac Colla (1906-1975). In particular, it considers the influence of Gaelic language, culture and nationalism on Mac Colla's corpus. Until now, critical reception of Mac Colla's writing has been dominated by the legacy of the latter stages of his career, meaning that he has been seen solely as an embittered and polemical writer, motivated only by an angry reaction to what he saw as the negative impact of Scotland's Reformation. This study argues that such criticism fails to acknowledge that Mac Colla's creative output was, in fact, far more wide-reaching and complex.

The thesis first considers Mac Colla's genealogy and biography – placing his novels within their cultural and political context – in order to establish the first comprehensive portrait of the man and his work, and to establish the relevance of his writing to a modern readership. Attention is then turned to *The Albannach* (1932) in the conviction that this is a major work in the canon of modern Scottish literature and deserves extensive reassessment with regard to its political and Gaelic cultural contexts. This study then focuses on the work that Mac Colla contributed to the periodical *The Free Man*. This impassioned and polemical writing has neither been fully researched nor explored and its analysis makes a significant new contribution to our understanding of Mac Colla's achievement. Lastly, the examination of *And the Cock Crew* (1945) highlights the peak and the turning point of his legacy in critical terms.

This study contends that Mac Colla's representation of the relationship between Scottish nationalism and Gaelic culture from the Highland Clearances to the 1930s was both politically and culturally radical. It is concluded that his writing, when examined in this context, proves him to be a novelist whose early work offers

more sophistication than has hitherto been explored, and ultimately extends his reputation far beyond that of a promising writer of unfulfilled early potential.

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"Is ann aig deireadh an latha is fheàrr na Domhnullaich"

Introduction

This thesis is a reassessment of the writing of Fionn Mac Colla (Thomas Macdonald, 1906-75) and aims to explore in detail the Gaelic foundations of the work he published during his lifetime. His reputation as a bitter polemicist whose obsessive focus on the Reformation and what he considered to be its subsequent effect upon the Scottish psyche has had an adverse and overbearing effect on the appreciation of his art as a novelist. Mac Colla's admittedly outspoken criticism of the Reformation and its legacy in Scotland has drawn critical attention away from these earlier, affirming, Gaelic cultural foundations. Moreover, his two major novels, *The Albannach* (1932) and *And the Cock Crew* (1945) demand reappraisal.

In the 1930s Mac Colla was a young writer with publicly acknowledged potential, to which Hugh MacDiarmid's championing of *The Albannach* can attest. However, his work has received little critical attention, apart from a brief resurgence in popularity in the 1970s, which was prompted by a younger generation of patriotic and nationalist Scottish writers and poets including David Morrison, John Herdman, Tom Scott, Alan Bold and Francis Thompson. This thesis presents the case that Mac Colla's early novels and journalism are vital contributions to the understanding of Scottish nationalism and politics in the early twentieth century. Also, through the positioning of Gaelic within the spectrum of twentieth-century Scottish literature, Mac Colla is a figure who was unique among his peers. The chapters that follow present and analyse the evidence for this.

Mac Colla is a neglected writer, partly because his writing is uncompromising and increasingly opinionated. As he published just two novels in his lifetime, *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*, his limited output is undoubtedly another reason

for his lack of any lasting reputation, and his overall body of work has generated a relatively small amount of critical examination, with only one short collection, the poet David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* (1973) being entirely devoted to these two novels.[1] In other volumes, criticism of Mac Colla's work rarely extends beyond chapters on 'Highland' writing; he is often referred to in passing as a representative of the more extreme flavour of Gaelic and Scottish nationalism in chapters which praise more prolific writers who are also closely associated with Highland themes: Mac Colla is notably often mentioned alongside Neil Gunn.[2] He is also occasionally compared with George Mackay Brown because both he and Mac Colla converted to Catholicism (Mackay Brown aged forty and Mac Colla at twenty-nine). At the time of writing, none of Mac Colla's books are in print; of the work examined in this thesis, *The Albannach* has not been re-published since 1984 and *And the Cock Crew* has remained out of print since 1995. This thesis presents the evidence that it is primarily Mac Colla's subject matter and critical misconceptions as to his motivation that account for the general neglect his work has suffered and the current stalemate with regard to any new criticism. This thesis accepts that Mac Colla's work noticeably shifted in focus throughout his career, but contends that critical approaches to the themes which are so paramount in his later work has led to an underestimation of his earlier work and the nature of his full achievement.

Mac Colla's first novel, *The Albannach*, with its radical presentation of the Gaidhealtachd, garnered a notable amount of both positive and negative attention in the press of the period. This criticism and journalism is a valuable resource in terms

[1]Morrison also dedicated an issue of *Scotia Review*, of which he was editor, to Mac Colla after his death in 1973.

[2]See Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 326, 713-14, 729, 843-4, 888, 891 for examples of Mac Colla's comparison with other, more prolific novelists. Murray and Tait's *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), pp. 55-77, is one of the few examples in recent times in which Mac Colla's work is examined at length, with his novel *And the Cock Crew* afforded an entire chapter.

of understanding the political attitudes and intellectual arguments of the 1930s, when the modern nationalist movement was in its infancy. Such an examination has never before been undertaken with reference to Mac Colla. Given that the complexities of Mac Colla's work become evident through a deeper study of such contexts, it is regrettable that it is still a subject dominating his posthumously published work – the negative impact of the Reformation on Scotland – which has since had the greatest impact on his overall reputation, especially when considering that the earliest reviews and attention he attracted overwhelmingly focus on Gaelic and the Gaidhealtachd as his major theme. This highlights the need to reassess the earlier work. Throughout Mac Colla's career and after his death, it has unfortunately been the practice of critics such as Gifford and Urquhart to interpret his lengthy, intellectual, historical and cultural engagement with regard to Gaelic in Scotland as a type of 'narrow' nationalism. This will be established through the examination of the initial reviews of *The Albannach.* Similarly, Mac Colla's analysis of the Reformation has generated critical responses by such as Tait and Murray that identifies an increasingly anti-Calvinist agenda in his work. As this thesis explains, these concerns are less important in *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* than in his later novels, but have been, nonetheless, increasingly misinterpreted as representing his overall agenda. The lasting impression has been one of an almost impenetrable canon of work, bitterly obsessed with the Reformation while promoting anti-English Scottish independence. This thesis establishes that opposition to Mac Colla's radical political re-imagining of the Gaidhealtachd and Scotland, coupled with the personal relationships among Scottish literary figures of the time, prompted an initial critical opposition to his work in *The Albannach*, and presents Mac Colla's intellectual and personal battles throughout his career as a defence of these basic ideas. The reassessment of his work

which is undertaken here dispels these misconceptions, and deservedly refocuses attention on Mac Colla's original message. Mac Colla needs to be given fair attention, because his message and themes are still relevant in Scotland today both as literature and as political thought. Generating 'a sharp awakening slap in the matter of language' is Mac Colla's explanation as to the purpose of *The Albannach*, along with the more general presentation of an 'extended parable or allegory of Scottish life, of the Scottish situation and an indication of the way out.'[3] *The Albannach* will be reassessed here as an exploration of a Gaelic experience in Scotland. It is notable, in this context, that Mac Colla was unable to secure a contract for a novel after *And the Cock Crew*; the various reasons for this, again, have not been fully considered until now. After *And the Cock Crew*, as this thesis concludes, the thematic attention in his novels shifted sharply from analysing the injustices which had been committed against Gaelic, and away from ideas of Gaelic as a relevant example of a radical experience in contemporary Scotland, such as he had presented in *The Albannach*.

When he died in 1975 at the age of 69, Mac Colla had published only two novels. Other notable works include a short novella, *Scottish Noël* (1958) and a book of non-fiction, cultural and political polemic, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967). The novels published after his death, *The Ministers* (1979) and *Move Up, John* (1994), had undergone extensive editing by John Herdman, Mac Colla's wife, Mary Macdonald, and publisher Ruth McQuillan before they were accepted for publication and their focus is notably different from Mac Colla's earlier work. Gaelic does not feature as a cultural or linguistic theme as it does in *The Albannach* or even as a political theme as in *And the Cock Crew*. Instead, the later fiction is deeply metaphysical in its religious argument – abstract thought takes over, even becoming

[3]Fionn Mac Colla,'"MeinBumpf", in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), 11-30, (p.13).

the narrative in some sections of *The Ministers*. There is a move away from the urban and rural realism which, for the most part, characterises his first two novels. Although Mac Colla never directly acknowledged it himself, there is also an autobiographical element to this later work that references his own intellectual struggles with public acceptance and success. In both later novels, ostracised central characters defend their beliefs as they are isolated, persecuted and misrepresented. Characters in these portrayals are exiled or threatened while communities and authoritative regimes do not accept or recognize the inherent 'truths' that are hopelessly argued before them. This thesis closely examines Mac Colla's own biography and politics, including the relationships which influenced and helped form the development of *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* and how his life and times influenced, and were reflected in, his work. When considering the later work in this context, it is poignant to note that these later novels were written while Mac Colla was under a self-imposed 'exile' with his family in the Outer Hebrides for two decades between 1941 and 1961.

This thesis does not seek to compare his novels against one another, but it will demonstrate that there is a clear division between the themes and tone of his first two novels and the work that was published after his death by examining the Gaelic foundations and motivations behind *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*. It will demonstrate that the clearest shift in thematic focus happens after *And the Cock Crew.* For the first time, this transition in his work will be fully explored. It moved away from the positive message of Gaelic rejuvenation and nationalism that he had initially presented in *The Albannach* through the journalism that he wrote for *The Free Man* in the intervening period between both novels. This demonstrates how his personal persuasions became more radical and increasingly found their way into his fiction.

Despite the radical nature of his political and cultural message for Gaelic culture, Mac Colla writes almost entirely in English. In this sense, he is a writer negotiating between the English and Gaelic worlds, providing an accurate representation of the bilingual balance – or opposition – in the Scotland that he knew. This dichotomy also represents the cultural and political position of Gaelic and Scotland within the Anglocentric United Kingdom and gives weight to Mac Colla's nationalist political agenda. The term 'Gaelic Experience' is established in this thesis to help bridge any difficulties which could arise in claiming Mac Colla as a 'Gaelic' writer. It sets out to establish Mac Colla's position in a more general Scottish literary canon as opposed to an examination of his place within the Gaelic world. Mac Colla did not write in Gaelic, but he wrote about Gaelic from a position of knowing the language well. Although his father was a native Gaelic speaker, he did not pass the language on which, for various reasons, was true of many of his generation. Mac Colla learned the language eventually, but there is evidence discussed in chapter three which suggests that he was not sufficiently fluent to write a novel in the language when he was writing *The Albannach*. However, as is established in chapter one, Gaelic represented for Mac Colla the political and cultural independence of Scotland in more than a linguistic sense.

This opening chapter contextualises Mac Colla's personal connections to Gaelic and Scotland, specifically his paternal heritage, back three generations to the experience of the Highland Clearances and the lingering impact this familial experience had on his work. This approach breaks new ground in the context of both his writing and the record of his life. The development of Mac Colla's own 'Gaelic Experience' is therefore a central focus because of the personal importance he himself

placed on it. This chapter redefines the parameters of the motivations and influences which were developed in his work using Mac Colla's own ideas on 'knowing' or being connected and entitled, through family experience, to culture, history and historical events. Chapter one also emphasises the importance that Mac Colla drew from place. Although this chapter is primarily about his paternal family and their history in the Gaidhealtachd, it also explores Mac Colla's connections through his mother to the North-East of Scotland, which he considered home and from which was drawn the influence of the conservative form of Christianity, The Plymouth Brethren, in which he was brought up. The influences of his childhood combined different elements of Scottish society.

As chapter one further examines, Hugh MacDiarmid seized upon Mac Colla's initial promise. In a significant article from 1932 which appeared in *The Free Man*, 'At the Sign of the Thistle', he declares Mac Colla's first novel as 'the most radical product yet of the whole renaissance', adding that 'Scotland is far from ripe yet for so radical a genius'.[4] This will be examined to discuss the extent to which this may have caused Mac Colla's career some harm through relationships with major writers like Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Neil M. Gunn. These relationships are also examined to highlight how he saw his own position in a modern Scottish literary context. This first chapter introduces the ideas, relationships and influences which became the basis for his work as a novelist.

Mac Colla's first novel *The Albannach* most encapsulates the affirming promotion of culture and identity that is the core of his early work; this was more or less abandoned in his posthumously published novels. Chapter two thus focuses on this text and reassesses its significance as a political work drawing on Gaelic history

[4] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'At the Sign of the Thistle' in *The Free Man*, June 25, 1932, p.4.

and culture to express the spiritual autonomy which Mac Colla had identified in the Gaidhealtachd. In depicting the harsh realities of life in the declining Gaidhealtachd as a direct challenge to the more established and stereotypically 'romantic' presentations of rugged geography, Mac Colla chooses to focus particular attention on the politics of language and place. *The Albannach* is examined through the intellectual, personal and culturally liberating context in which it was conceived. Some published criticism from the period interpreted the novel as an attack on the Highlands and on Scotland, and this particular context is examined for the first time in this thesis. Political attitude is an important aspect of this chapter, with the articles written against *The Albannach* indicating the political divides in Scotland at the time. This allows us to examine exactly how Mac Colla's work was misrepresented or misinterpreted. 'Pig's Eyes in Alba' and the other articles examined in this chapter demonstrate the worth of Mac Colla's writing and allow us to consider the attitudes which Mac Colla was inspired to write against.

The Albannach and *And the Cock Crew* are nationalist books. Written during the first significant wave of the modern nationalist movement in Scotland, they envision the nation through the impulse of cultural and historical redefinitions. Mac Colla was encouraged by Hugh MacDiarmid whose great poem of Scottish nationality, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, had been published in 1926. The literary climate was being redefined through the example of modernist writers like Joyce, Pound and Eliot and *The Albannach* seriously revised the representation of the Gaidhealtachd and represented its politics and culture with a contemporary urgency not seen since the poetry of the Highland Clearances. This chapter revisits the origins of this radicalism through a comparison with the sentiments of this poetry, an approach which further highlights the depth with which Mac Colla explored his

subject-matter. The protagonist of *The Albannach*, Murdo Anderson, represents a radical re-thinking of the Gaidhealtachd and Scottish nationhood; Mac Colla's unification of the indigenous national tongue and contemporary, radical nationalism is arguably one of the most conclusive examples of this symbiosis in modern Scottish literature. For Mac Colla, Gaelic is the obvious representation of an independent mind and nation.

What is described as the 'Gaelic Experience' (as established in chapter one) is scrutinised more closely here through the appearance of Gaelic music and song and the role of the Bard in the community, all of which are central to *The Albannach*'s message of an affirming culture and identity. Music is given a notable role and its inclusion in chapter two serves to complement the origins of this love and inspiration in Mac Colla's life. *The Albannach* modernises the portrayal of the Gaidhealtachd. For Mac Colla, Gaelic represented a radical challenge to established authority.

Chapter three emphasises Mac Colla's intellectual arguments for independence in the 1920s and 1930s by examining his ideas on independence and nationalism as he presented them in the nationalist newspaper, *The Free Man*. Mac Colla's first two novels contribute a Scottish Gaelic perspective to the artistic and historical revisionist movements of the early twentieth century in Scotland and the articles he published for *The Free Man* after completing *The Albannach* are hugely important when considering the first-hand themes and personal politics which were represented in this fiction. These articles have never before been scrutinized.[5] By analysing their influence and charting Mac Colla's early experiences in the periodical

[5]Marjory Palmer McCulloch has included some of Mac Colla's *The Free Man* articles in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939* (University of Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), pp. ix, 87.

culture of these decades their inclusion in this chapter establishes that they must now be considered as central to Mac Colla's corpus and any future examination of his ideas. Such examination demonstrates the development of Mac Colla's varied and complex ideas, which can be used to identify the beginnings of a change of focus, as well as a shift in tone, as he was preparing to write *And the Cock Crew.*

The opinions which Mac Colla presents in *The Free Man* clearly influenced the political and cultural arguments that would be the focus for *And the Cock Crew.* The source of these influences will be juxtaposed with Mac Colla's experiences in the Gaelic revival movement of the period, continuing the emphasis in this thesis on the influence of Mac Colla's own experiences on his writing. Importantly, the articles also highlight Mac Colla's first serious engagement with psychology; a theme which, as this thesis argues in chapter four, came to dominate his second major novel, *And the Cock Crew*. The seeds of the dialectical arguments that are employed in *And the Cock Crew* and develop even further in the posthumously published work, are clearly sown in *The Free Man*. Establishing this accentuates the importance of his early work by clearly identifying Mac Colla's dramatic ideas, but it also allows us to view his arguments within the political contexts of the period. His arguments focus increasingly on the psychology of opposing views with regard to the political geography of Scotland and still have relevance in Scottish politics and society today.

Mac Colla's approaches to history, culture and politics are further identified in chapter three with regard to the influences of nations and states as diverse as Finland and Palestine. It is demonstrated that he advocated and applied intellectual approaches to the situation of Gaelic in Scotland through these examples and created a universal context for the themes which appeared in *The Albannach* and were developed in *And the Cock Crew*. Chapter three establishes that Mac Colla was

creating a Gaelic nationalist discourse that was local in its motivation and international in its influence. In this, he is entirely unique for the period.

The general sentiment and opposition to his politics unleashed in the press with the publication of *The Albannach* was to become a focus of Mac Colla's arguments for political and linguistic independence in *The Free Man* articles. The attention given in this thesis to Mac Colla's experiences in the Gaelic movement, and the influence this had on his ideas with regard to psychology and nationalism as established in chapter three, presents Mac Colla's contributions to the contextualised understanding of contemporary Gaelic culture and society in Scotland as major contributions to the political and historical reimagining of the nation, which was ongoing in the 1930s.

Concentrating on the politically-minded combination of Gaelic and nationalism that *The Albannach* would eventually deliver, Mac Colla's first engagements with the Gaelic element of the Scottish nationalist movement are established here for the first time. Through the study of correspondence with the Gaelic proponent, Annie Johnstone of Barra, which I have translated from Gaelic and which has never been critically examined before, new ground is broken in this thesis in establishing the extent to which Mac Colla was organising and developing political propaganda for the nationalist movement in the 1920s, demonstrating the full extent of the cultural and political contexts he was cultivating in Scotland before he began his first novel. His experiences with the Gaelic organisation, An Comunn Gaidhealach, are also detailed in chapter three and it is established that the cultural movement and the political movement were intertwined and had connections to similar radical movements in Wales and Ireland.

Chapter four continues the examination of the political and cultural focus of Mac Colla's writing, charting the development of his thematic engagement with contemporary Scottish issues through the Clearances novel, *And the Cock Crew*. *And the Cock Crew* is a culmination, perhaps even a conclusion, to his original Gaelic focus, an apotheosis of Mac Colla's 'Gaelic Experience'. By exploring the historical psychologies of opposing forces in Scotland, *And the Cock Crew* justifies and articulates a contemporary bitterness and anger at Scotland's political situation. The main criticisms against Mac Colla's writing are directed at this laboured and dialectical aspect of his work which chapter three establishes was carried over from his time at *The Free Man*. This thesis charts the development of this element of his writing and places it in context, establishing that the original purpose of *And the Cock Crew*, which was to examine and challenge the psychology of opposing wills in Scotland, has been lost amongst the more obvious criticism of the Reformation which is mistakenly identified as Mac Colla's central concern and motivation.

Chapter four examines how Mac Colla's ideas would eventually take him to the polemical rhetoric of *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, and the long dialectical arguments of *The Ministers* and *Move Up, John* by explaining where these ideas originated and how they developed before *And the Cock Crew*. This is done through a close examination of the 'Cùis na Cànain' series of articles, which he wrote for *The Free Man* after completing *The Albannach*. The complexity and relevance of the themes in these articles have, thus far, been overlooked.

It will, however, be acknowledged that Mac Colla's writing became increasingly intense. The concern for contemporary Gaelic, which was initiated in *The Albannach*, was rooted in Mac Colla's personal history; his defence of its legacy finally developed into an increasingly negative position, which is profoundly

expressed in *And the Cock Crew*. The 'Cùis na Cànain' articles voice the development of his radicalism. Through the combination of examining these articles and the focus on the character of Maighstir Sachairi in the novel and what he represents in this context, a full picture of Mac Colla's development as a writer and proponent of independence of both nation and mind through the 'Gaelic Experience' is finally presented.

Chapter four concludes with an exploration of the increasingly strong attitudes Mac Colla begins to develop at this stage in his writing with regard to the Protestant Reformation. However, critical focus will shift from Mac Colla's perceived 'obsession' with Calvinistic doctrines and Protestantism to what he saw as the secular, general, 'conditioned' psychology of Scots, which, he argues and this chapter confirms through his own words, is the continuing central conflict at the heart of his work.

This thesis emphasises Mac Colla's concerns which were, primarily, nationality and independence. It contends, however, that Mac Colla developed these concerns in *And the Cock Crew* through the context of Calvinist doctrines as stimulus; that this was not a criticism of the Reformation or of religion, but rather, as chapter four concludes, developed an examination of the psychological reasons behind such doctrinal belief systems and the effect this had on society and the nation. The attitudes and psychology which directed the implementation of what Mac Colla considered to be the crushing of human affirmation and joy, the forces of opposition and negativity, implemented and propagated through elitist systems of government and power, were inherent in men he later termed as 'Gnyaffs' and 'Nay-Sayers'. This study is intended to free Mac Colla from accusations of sectarianism and shrill 'hatred

of all things English'.[6] This is crucially important because it removes any accusations of religious bias from his work, which, as will be explained through an analysis of John Herdman's article 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas' in *Cencrastus* (1983), became motivated by an attempt to prove his non-partisanship against misinterpretations of his motives.[7] This chapter details Mac Colla's own voice directly through his journalism; these same arguments are juxtaposed with the character of Fearchar, the exiled village Bard, to demonstrate that Mac Colla's journalistic arguments clearly developed into his fiction and stresses his detailed attention to intellectual argument.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of Mac Colla's overall achievement in his lifetime, in the context of the development of his ideas about language, politics and Scottish history. The posthumously-published fiction may be the subject for further study, but neither of these last two novels is given extended consideration in this thesis, as the concern here is principally with the two major novels Mac Colla published in his lifetime and the discussion of their qualities in the full context of the history of Mac Colla's ideas. The posthumously published work will only be noted in passing. The value of Mac Colla's two major works in the context of the development of his understanding and exploration of 'the Gaelic experience' is the focus of this thesis. Their reappraisal, I hope, should lead to the re-establishment of their permanent significance in modern Scottish literature.

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[6] See Douglas Gifford et al *Scottish Literature*, p. 714.
[7] John Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', *Cencrastus*, 13 (1983), pp. 11-13.

Chronology

4th March 1906	**Thomas Douglas MacDonald** is born in Montrose to Donald McDonald, a shoemaker, and Jessie Anderson Douglas.[8]
12th April 1909	**The McDonald family moves to 104 Murray Street, Montrose**.
1911	**Mac Colla attends Townhead primary school in Montrose**. In *Too Long in this Condition* Mac Colla discusses much of his time as a young boy in Montrose, and how his experiences there affected his life; for example, his understanding of the uses of different languages in Scotland: 'I ought to interpolate a mention of my use of "Scots" words. This is not an affectation. On the contrary it is the use of English words in connection with the experiences of this early period which would be an affectation. I speak of the experiences in the gairden because for me it happened in a gairden: – things go very deep, if they do not indeed go all the way; it is questionable whether any experience of significance could in those days have occurred to me in a garden, still less in a gahdn. Similarly I went to the Tounheid Skale, its universal designation. I did not go to school until I was in my teens and considerably de-culturalised, and the experience was very different from going to a skale – as I have no doubt the experiences tended to be less significant in general and in a lower key – *an element of the artificial and uncandid had entered into my personality as a result of the experience of "school" as opposed to "skale*"' (Mac Colla, 1975, 17).
1917-1923	**Mac Colla attends Montrose Academy**. 'There was something about education as it was imposed on us that suggested, rather insultingly, that I was only a young child, and *would not notice* that I was being used, in a modern phrase, as "idea fodder". This impression persisted throughout the curriculum but was particularly strong in the literature classes and of course above all in the history classes. Here I felt very strongly the presence of something "double", that I was being made the victim of some system of ideas, not selected because they were objectively true, or added up to objective truth, but

[8] The spelling of 'Macdonald' appears to have been changed by Mac Colla himself at some point, as all records concerning the family on his father's side use the spelling 'McDonald'. It is possible that the name was misspelled by those compiling the records. For the sake of accuracy, this disparity has been observed throughout this thesis.

because they formed part of a general consistent system Somebody had agreed to put together and impress on us, because of Something which I recognised I was too young to understand. But I deeply resented the sense that I was being manipulated, like a mere "thing" that picked up impressions, like – I used to observe them covertly – as far as I could see, all my contemporaries. It was all too vague for me to make anything of it, and in any case I was much too hauden doun by both parents and school. But I resented it, the feeling that I was being counted on to submit with docility to having my attitudes formed for me…' (Mac Colla, 1975, 38).

1923 **Attends Aberdeen teacher training college.**
Joins the Independent Labour Party in Aberdeen. Before the formation of the National Party of Scotland, the Independent Labour Party campaigned for Scottish self-government. 'Its aims were two-fold, Scottish self-government and social justice, the second, it being understood, depending on the first – as James Maxton put it: "We could do more for Scotland in 5 years of self-government and social justice than in 25 years at Westminster." In the General Election of 1924 Comrade Macdonald, red-rosetted and oblivious of the jeers of the multitude, toiled up and down stairs canvassing in the Labour interest in the then waste land of South Aberdeen.' ('Mein Bumpf' in David Morrison (ed.), *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, 1973, 12).

1924 **First Labour Government**.
Although he was, initially, a member of the Independent Labour Party, Mac Colla quickly became disillusioned with the government's lack of commitment to 'social justice', and enthusiasm for Scottish self-government: 'Historians point out that the 1924 Election put the Labour Party in office, but not in power. But they had sensed power, and were never to get rid of its heady scent. I was active in the movement, the movement was all around me, and by some proleptic sense I anticipated what was in fact to happen. Whereas the Labour Party came into existence for the sake of the working class, the time was soon to come when the working class was to be looked on as existing for the sake of the Labour Party, their part or role in politics being simply that of keeping the Party in power by means of their voting strength. Similarly Scottish self-government would continue to be officially professed so long as the votes it earned were necessary for the Party to attain or remain in power; thereafter it would be jettisoned. All of which in due course and in a manner of the utmost callousness and cynicism came to pass. So from 1924 onwards my enthusiasm for Labour and its professions of policy waned: I sensed the coming perfidy' (Mac Colla, 1973, 12).

1925 **Mac Colla Graduates from teacher training college after sitting his final examinations**.
'It was the final Joint examination in Education which all students in teacher training, graduate and non-graduate, from the four Colleges of Education in Scotland were obliged to sit to mark the completion of their training. I have always been a severe critic of our examination system as a method of testing anything – unless perhaps stamina *on the day*, whereas I have no doubt a number of distinguished students had an "off" day. As it transpired I scored the highest marks in Scotland and emerged in the first place in the country.' (Mac Colla, 1975, 72).

1926 **Mac Colla begins his teaching career in the North-West Highlands**.
His keen interest in Gaelic, as well as his outstanding examination results drew favourable attention: 'The Director of Education for Ross and Cromarty, on a recruiting visit to Aberdeen, finding there was such a person who according to a testimonial had in addition while a student "spent much of his leisure time in acquiring an accurate and fluent knowledge of the Gaelic language", promptly offered me a choice of some five teaching posts in his County. I chose one as headmaster of Laide Public School in the district of Gairloch (from which had come MacKenzie, editor of the celebrated collection, *Sar-Obair nam Bard Gaidhealach*, better known generally as *The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry* – and my soul would be more beautiful at this moment if I had it all in memory and at command' (Mac Colla, 1975, 72). However, he soon became dissatisfied with his position in this area of the Highlands which was 'virtually 100 per cent Gaelic-speaking', and became disgusted with his role which was to accomplish the 'de-Gaelicisation of the 56 or so young children in the school and their Anglicisation as quickly as possible with a view to their speedy scattering across the earth, an ultimate aim long ago consummated, the occasion marked by the closure of the school' (Mac Colla, 1975, 72-3).

1926 **Leaves Scotland to teach for three years at the United Free Church of Scotland's College at Safed in Palestine.**

11th February 1928 **The National Party of Scotland is formed as a political party to promote Scottish independence.**

1928 **Mac Colla returns from Palestine to attend a Gaelic Summer School in Broadford, Skye.**
While there, he joins the newly formed National Party of Scotland.

1929 **Returns from Palestine permanently**.
He arrives in Montrose to devote himself to the Scottish movement and to writing. The family home is 12 Links Avenue. He 'renews personal acquaintance' with his neighbour, Hugh MacDiarmid. (Morrison, 1973, 13).

September 1929 **Mac Colla moves to 18 Pyrland Road, Highbury, London, with Hugh MacDiarmid and his family**.
It is here that Mac Colla begins writing *The Albannach.* (Morrison, 1973, 13).

Autumn 1929 **Returns to Scotland**.
Mac Colla begins studying Gaelic at Glasgow University but lack of funds prevents him from continuing further than a year.

1930 **Mac Colla makes his first trip to Barra**.
Meets Maighstir Iain Mac 'ille a'Mhaoil (Father John MacMillan) and lays his plans for a land raid on Rum.

Winter 1930 ***The Albannach* is completed.**
First novel completed in the last weeks of 1930 in St. Andrews, in the house of the wealthy Jewish-American J.H. Whyte. Mac Colla expresses his intention to write a historical novel on the Highland Clearances.

1931 **Edward Baird begins *Portrait of a Young Scotsman*.**
It is likely that the Montrose-born artist Edward Baird began his celebrated portrait of Mac Colla, *Portrait of a Young Scotsman* at this time, during one of Mac Colla's visits back to Montrose. The painting was believed lost for over seventy years, until it was fortuitously rediscovered in 2010 (see frontispiece). 'It seems that the portrait, together with Mac Colla's novel, was the fruit of a close creative partnership between the two men. Mac Colla would have sat for hours for Baird's portrait. Baird, in his turn, signed official legal papers relating to the publication of *The Albannach* and is likely to have read the draft at various stages' (Blackwood, 2004, 34). As Baird reported in an interview to *The Angus and Mearns Herald* in 1932: 'It is an attempt to paint a modern and distinctively Scottish portrait…to make a synthesis between an acquired technique, partly from sources, an actively involved sense of being part of a re-vivified Scottish Culture, and lastly the individual and the model…He felt that Scots art wanted to make a new start, because the national idioms of Scots art had been overlaid by the false products of the "kailyard" school, or its equivalent in art…The Italian primitives and the French

School showed the way to develop an art which was characteristically Scottish'(Blackwood, 2004, 34).

April 1932 — ***Portrait of a Young Scotsman*** is exhibited to favourable comment at the Royal Academy in London.

June 1932 — **Publication of *The Albannach*.**
The Albannach is published by John Heritage (The Unicorn Press) of which Hugh MacDiarmid was director.

Late 1932 — **Begins working on *The Free Man*.**
Mac Colla co-operates with Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Robin Black and George Dott in producing the periodical *The Free Man* in Edinburgh. Continues working for the paper for all of 1933.

1933 — ***Portrait of a Young Scotsman*** **is hung in the Royal Scottish Academy**.

Summer 1934 — **Begins writing *And the Cock Crew*.**
Mac Colla begins writing *And the Cock Crew* at George Scott-Moncrieff's cottage at Cademuir. *Butcher's Broom* by Neil Gunn is published.

1935 — Most of *And the Cock Crew* is written in the earliest months of the year at Inverasdail, Ross-Shire. Mac Colla returns to Edinburgh, unemployed and penniless. Fellow Montrosian Helen Cruikshank offers him a room she keeps in George Street. *And the Cock Crew* is completed with the exception of the final two chapters.

Summer 1935 — **Begins working for the New University Society.**
Work on *And the Cock Crew* is halted when Mac Colla begins to work for the New University Society. Here he meets native Gaelic speaker Mary Doyle, from Islay, who is the principal secretary of the firm.

31 December 1935 — **Converts to Catholicism**
Mac Colla is received into the Roman Catholic Church at Dundee and takes the Catholic name of Joseph.

24 January 1936	**Marries Mary Doyle at St. Peter's and St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church, Dundee**.
1938	***And the Cock Crew* is completed.** Work at the New University Society comes to an end. Mac Colla and his young family move to a house lent to them in Letterfourie in Banffshire. *And the Cock Crew* is finally completed.
1939	**WWII.** Outbreak of war prevents Mac Colla from finding a publisher for *And the Cock Crew*.
1940	Mac Colla is offered a teaching position in the Western Isles.
January 1941	**Benbecula.** Takes up the position of headmaster of Torlum School on Benbecula. An extract from the H.M. Inspectors' Report for the session 1942/3 notes that 'English is credibly done … Written work is particularly neat, reading is clear and fluent, and conversation is ready.' It also notes that 'cleaning is unsatisfactory, the headmaster's room being exceedingly dirty' (*An t-Uibhisteach*, 1, 1996, p.20.)
1945	With the end of the war, *And the Cock Crew* is finally published by William MacLellan.
1946-1961	**Barra.** The family moves to Barra where Mac Colla takes up the position of headmaster in Northbay. *Move Up, John* is completed.
1958	***Scottish Noel*, a fragment of Mac Colla's unpublished novel *Move Up, John* is privately published.**
1961	**Returns to Edinburgh.** Mac Colla leaves the Western Isles and returns to Edinburgh, to live at 40A Morningside Park. He teaches for a further six years.
1967	***At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* is published.** Mac Colla retires from teaching.

1973	David Morrison's edition of *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* is published. It remains the only comprehensive collection of criticism on the work of Mac Colla.
20 July 1975	**Mac Colla dies of heart failure in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.** His ashes are buried at Mount Vernon cemetery, Edinburgh, on 24 July 1975. He leaves at least three unpublished novels as well as short stories and poems.
August 1975	Mac Colla's autobiography, *Too Long in this Condition (Ro Fhada Mar so a Tha Mi)* is published.
1979	*The Ministers* is published.
1994	*Move Up, John* is published.
2010	*Portrait of a Young Scotsman* is discovered in England.
2012	*Portrait of a Young Scotsman* on permanent display in the National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

Chapter One: The Life

A Declining Culture

Fionn Mac Colla was born Thomas Douglas Macdonald, at 9 White's Place, Montrose, on the fourth of March 1906. The 'Douglas' name comes from his mother's side of the family, from the North East, whom Mac Colla proudly proclaimed as authentic 'Mearns peasant folk'. His father's side of the family, the Macdonalds, came from Easter Ross in the Gaelic-speaking Highlands, and it is from this side of his family that Mac Colla drew much of the inspiration which would influence his work as a writer. This rich branching of Scottish cultures gave Mac Colla an insight with regard to Scottish cultural identification – he was adept at engaging, not only Gaelic, but also with the Scots language and various national cultural themes. J.B. Caird wrote in 1975 that 'Mac Colla is the only Scottish novelist to have effected in his work a synthesis of Highland and Lowland'[1] and that 'it is not fanciful to trace the dual influences of the Gaidhealtachd and the North-East on his personality and work'.[2] While the undoubted importance of Scots language and cultural themes in Mac Colla's work will be acknowledged throughout, the main focus must stay with the influence of Gaelic. Therefore, in this chapter, there will be an emphasis on the background of his paternal family.

In a draft copy of Mac Colla's autobiographical essay 'Mein Bumpf', later edited and published two years before his death in David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* (1973), Mac Colla writes: 'Bad manners, writing about a man while he's alive. A man's life isn't haberdashery to be rummaged and held up to the light. "And after he's dead?" Leave him alone. I'd much rather it were. So ought it be with Fionn

[1] James B. Caird, 'Remarkable writer; and man', *Scots Independent*, September 1975, p. 8.
[2] James B. Caird, 'Fionn MacColla-the Twofold Heritage', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla,* ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p.32.

Mac Colla … What difference can it possibly make to the force or cogency or usefulness of my ideas whether I am tall or short or my eyes brown or green.'[3] Morrison had asked for a brief introduction to his book of essays – quite sensibly then, he left its composition to Mac Colla. As this note suggests, Mac Colla did not place much emphasis on what he considered to be the 'trivial' facts of his life, dismissing such matters as of little importance. On the face of it at least, he appears to have been of the opinion that his life (and any outside interest in it) was as equal in importance to his work as an analysis of his appearance, and humorously quips in the finished essay that such matters are irrelevant to him at least: 'I am asked for some significant facts about my life. I could more readily comply if I knew what has been significant.'[4]

However, there is never any suggestion that he refuses to divulge information which he himself feels is significant to his work. Any student of Mac Colla will quickly discover that his writing and his ideas are a serious analysis of the Scottish condition and warrant serious and detailed consideration. Nowhere, however, does he write that any genuine biographical interest in him could serve to shed any significant light on his ideas. Suitably, his autobiography, *Too Long in This Condition*, is more of a history of his ideas and attitudes than it is about him as a man. And yet, as shall be established, he was proud of his dual Scottish heritage and felt that any success he had had as a writer and a thinker was due to the people he had come from. This chapter is not intended to be merely a biographical examination of Fionn Mac Colla. It is, rather, a sketch of an artist and a Scottish Nationalist and closely follows the remit of Mac Colla's biography in terms of his growing awareness of his abilities as a writer. There were events and experiences which caused Mac Colla to develop or

[3] NLS, Dep 265/17.
[4] Fionn Mac Colla,'"Mein Bumpf", in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, 11-30, (p.11).

even shift the course of his work. At times, he adapted old paths and forged new ones – these important experiences will be noted here, but the central concern, as with Morrison's *Essays*, must remain with the man's work and the history of ideas which informed it. It does not appear to have been Mac Colla's desire to be a great public figure despite the nature of his success in his chosen field. In any case, it is through his writing that his voice continues to be heard.

Mac Colla's natural gift for prose and his commitment to his philosophical and social ideals led him to pursue a career with which he was not always entirely happy or even satisfied, though his sheer ferocity of political and cultural conviction determined that a literary-based devotion to his history, his country and his people, was not only necessary, but unavoidable. 'I was a born writer' he writes in an unpublished note – 'By which I do not mean that I had a desire, or itch to write or an ambition to be known as a writer – on the contrary, writing has always caused me intense suffering and being well known intense embarrassment'.[5] As a writer, he adopted the name Fionn Mac Colla – a suitably heroic and patriotic name combining mythical Celtic origin with Clan warfare. It is the Scottish Gaelic translation of Fionn MacCool, the legendary Hunter-Warrior-Seer and central hero of the Fenian Cycle in Old Irish Literature; but it is also a reference to Mac Colla's namesake, the feared, ambidextrous, seventeenth-century Highland warrior Alasdair Mac Colla Chiotaich Mac Dhòmhnaill also known as 'The Devastator.' Mac Colla's decision to choose a name which clearly highlighted a recognition of the strong Gaelic ties which linked Ireland and Scotland, demonstrates not only the political direction of his work, but is an outright statement of its cultural origins. As will be argued, Mac Colla's political and literary presence, through writing and campaigning, was an important

[5] NLS, Dep 265/17.

contribution to both the foundation of nationalist politics in Scotland and to the Scottish Literary Renaissance of the twentieth century. His fiction connects matters of cultural and historical importance and the novels published during his life, when examined along with the political and cultural contexts of the period, demonstrate the influence that his own political and philosophical ideas had on his work. Among these ideas, it is his assault on the issues surrounding the 'life-denying' Calvinist doctrines of Presbyterianism with which he has perhaps become most closely associated. Polemical in character, this might prompt polemic response, but this thesis attempts a more measured reading of Mac Colla's work and focuses critical attention on his earliest impetus: examining and determining a Gaelic experience.

With that said, there can be no denial that from his first novel, Mac Colla's work began with a criticism of 'nay-saying' and negative attitudes – attitudes which he came to attribute to the Reformation with increasing vigour and seriousness in his later work. In connecting the historical to the cultural and political, he believed, for example, that 'the close cooperation between church and England destroyed the Celtic heritage of Scotland' and, therefore, facilitated the loss of Scottish national sovereignty.[6] These ideas are hammered out to some extent in his fiction, though culminate most notably in his book of political polemic, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967), and to a lesser extent in his posthumously published autobiography *Too Long in This Condition* (1975). It can be said that this 'nay-saying' attitude itself became the focus of his later and posthumously published work; that it subsumed the original 'life-affirming' message of *The Albannach* – it can also be conceded that it informs the conclusions of *And the Cock Crew*. It is this development, his focus as a

[6] Johann Schwend, 'Calvin Walker – Still Going Strong. The Scottish Kirk in Early 20th Century Scottish Fiction', in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*, ed. by J. Schwend and H.W. Drescher (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), 335-345 (p.341).

writer and a thinker, which will be under scrutiny here. At times then, Mac Colla is fierce, wild and provocative, though never less than compelling as a writer.

In an essay entitled 'Fionn Mac Colla – The Twofold Heritage', J.B. Caird writes that Mac Colla's works are '… concerned with man in relation to the community in which he finds himself, to the tradition and civilisation that have moulded him.'[7] This relationship between man and community, or man and culture, and the relationship between place and history, is something which frequently affects writing concerned with the Highlands and Gaelic. Iain Crichton Smith, for example, determined his own focus on this relationship as the examination of 'real people in a real place'[8] – this is what is so important to the underpinning of the cultural influences in Mac Colla's work – there is a relationship with community and place through language. Aside from presenting the realities of the decline of traditional Gaelic communities in his fiction though, Mac Colla also argued that this decline was of great concern for Scotland as a whole. Gaelic had, in the past, been in a much more influential and important cultural position – it was more widely spoken in the very recent past, for example, than was commonly believed or understood by contemporary generations. Any appreciation of this cultural and historical fact related directly to Scotland's political situation and was absolutely crucial in contributing to the idea of a separate and unique Scottishness: 'Gaelic gave the nation its unity, despite later incursions of Northern English, it continued to be the national language in almost every part of the country', he writes in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*.[9] He was to become certain that the decline of Gaelic could be ascribed in great part to the rampant growth of Calvinism in Scotland and he believed that, 'beyond question … Gaelic was the majority speech of Scotland until the effects of the "Reformation" had

[7] Caird, 1973, p.31.
[8] See Iain Crichton Smith, *Towards the Human* (Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers, 1986), pp.13-74.
[9] Fionn Mac Colla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: M. Macdonald, 1967), pp.46-47.

made themselves felt, and persisted in certain non-Highland areas practically into modern times.'[10] Mac Colla's writing set out to challenge and expose lazy cultural and historical 'truths' concerning the position of Gaelic in Scotland – the myth, for example, that Gaelic was a fringe culture and that its ancient roots were an irrelevance to a 'modern' Scotland. Essentially, he sought to highlight his belief that it was an unforgiving psychological state for Scotland to be mostly English speaking. He strongly connected Gaelic with ideas of nationhood, using history and place as themes in his fiction. Gaelic's geographical reach, he rightly claimed, had stretched very comfortably outside of what is routinely considered to be the 'Gaidhealtachd' of today. The following is quoted from Charles W.J. Withers and Kenneth MacKinnon, as an example of just how widespread Gaelic was spoken only 15 years before Mac Colla's birth:

> Buteshire was quite strongly Gaelic (20.7 per cent), and only a short distance separated the great Lowland cities from a Gaelic-speaking countryside. Gaelic predominated in the central Highlands, north-west Perthshire, Badenoch, Strathspey, Lochaber, Loch Ness-side, mainland Argyllshire … and throughout Sutherland.[11]

Gaelic had been a major language in Scotland as recently as the early twentieth century. Mac Colla believed that the reality of its situation – both its history and its potential – as a language unique to Scotland was inextricably linked to any moves towards political independence.

He did believe that evangelical Protestantism had played a role in curtailing traditional Gaelic culture, but it was not the only problem he identified, and this thesis will demonstrate that he viewed this issue as a symptom of a greater difficulty.

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[10] Fionn Mac Colla, *Ro Fhada Mar So A Tha Mi/ Too Long In This Condition* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1975), p. 105.
[11] Charles W.J. Withers and Kenneth MacKinnon, 'Gaelic speaking in Scotland, demographic history', in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick Thomson (Glasgow: Gairm, 1983; rep. 1994) 109-114, (p.111).

Writing in *Too Long in This Condition* of his father's younger days in Inverness-shire, Mac Colla considers that 'not a word but Gaelic was spoken…before the school had begun to exercise its malign influence.'[12] There was a keenly felt awareness on Mac Colla's part as to the steep generational decline in spoken Gaelic throughout the course of the twentieth century, but this also raises one of the issues which he chose to blame for the neglect and decline of the language, and which also developed a 'conditioned', negative response to self-government. He attributed this mostly to what Herdman identifies as '…the effects of a negating or "Nay-saying" consciousness upon the Scottish community: a consciousness which he sees embodied in a Reformation Protestantism,'[13] which had 'conditioned' Scotland over five hundred years. This condition was at odds with Mac Colla's own engagement with history, an engagement which stretched into Scotland's past far beyond the Reformation, or any single, 'nation-defining', event. Implanting this adverse psychological conditioning of Scotland, the argument goes, was the work of 'Scottish' 'education':

> Scotland is like a graveyard – there are hundreds such up and down the country – on whose stones only English are inscribed: whereas those who are supposed to be commemorated spoke a different language…This is an exact symbol of what has happened in our minds. By the time our 'Scottish' 'education' has done its work, when the historiographers have had their indoctrinating way, our ideas with their accreted emotions and prejudices are as solid as tombstones in our minds.[14]

This attitude towards the Scottish education system and its attitude towards history and the Gaelic language reflects just a small aspect of Mac Colla's wide-ranging overall argument. Transcending his fiction, his argument for an independent Scotland reinforces attention on Gaelic and history – this began to develop, with noted misery,

[12] Mac Colla, 1975, p.63.
[13] John Herdman, 'An Aspect of Fionn MacColla as a Novelist', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, 46-52, (p.46).
[14] Mac Colla, 1975, pp. 60-61.

after he became a teacher in 1925 in Wester Ross. It is significant that after scoring the highest marks in the country for his teaching examination, Mac Colla chose to be posted in a Gaelic-speaking area in the North West Highlands.

After becoming a teacher at the age of just nineteen, Mac Colla was posted as headmaster to Laide Public school in Wester Ross where he was immediately displeased at the position of Gaelic in the Scottish education system. Dismayed at finding himself in a position in which he was effectively contributing to the 'de-Gaelicisation' of the Highlands in not allowing the children to undertake lessons in their native tongue, he would make the children say their prayers in Gaelic. From early in his career Gaelic motivated his choices, though he realised that he was defeated:

> I had neither the experience nor the authority – after all I was barely twenty – either to fight a one–man battle against the embattled system of the establishment or to organise one on a larger scale…After all over thirty years later the god-head of the Educational System was emitting thunderous disclaimers about 'Gaelic for Gaelic's sake'.[15]

Aside from the historical impact on Gaelic from the evangelical factions in the Kirk, Mac Colla recognized that Gaelic remained under threat from the education system. It was witnessing the dissolution of the Gaelic language in action, in this social environment, which prompted him to sympathetically examine the cultural and social causes and implications which had led to the dissolution of a Gaelic identity or experience and fractured Scotland. It is this concern for the language, and the implications of this loss for the people and the nation, that are the main motivating factors behind his seeking to bring the predicament to the public's attention in *The Albannach* through the determining of a 'realistic' Gaelic experience. It is perhaps familiar to see the poetry of Sorley Maclean, especially *Dain do Eimhir* (1943) as the

[15] Ibid., p. 73.

key intervention in modern Scottish literature, overturning ideas about the Gaelic world and modernity. But Mac Colla had actually begun this process in the 1930s with this novel.

Aberdeenshire: 'The Genes are Paramount'

Asked to supply some significant facts about his life in 'Mein Bumpf' for David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, he writes:

> My birth certificate says I was born at 9 White's Place, Montrose, on 4th March 1906. The doctor in attendance is reputed to have said on viewing the new arrival, that he was 'weel and warl-like' … I have also been told that the day was a Sunday, and the kirk bells were ringing at the time. There may have been some significance in that.[16]

It is notable that a man who would develop such distinct Gaelic patriotism was not, as it happens, born or raised in the Highlands. Growing up in Montrose, on the east coast of Scotland, his identification with Gaelic came initially through his father, and the important influence, not all of it positive, of the McDonald family's chosen way of life as Plymouth Brethren, which can also be seen to have had an influence on the themes which would dominate his writing as Fionn Mac Colla. Gaelic and religion were both elements to which he was exposed as a very young child, and he later claimed that what he considered to be these two opposing aspects of Scottish culture and society were distinctly understood and set apart in his young mind from his first comprehension of them. The opening of his autobiography, written when he was in his late sixties, begins with Mac Colla describing himself as a 'Pilgrim of Truth', a status which he ascribes, at least in some part, to the influence of his father:

> It never occurred to me that anything could in any circumstances be preferred to Truth. Not even when my father…having guessed something of the fact, which was that my passion for Truth had led me at one time into the position of a 'down and out', in his innocence offered me there and then a half share in

[16] Mac Colla, 1973, p. 11.

> his business…on the single and in his eyes trifling condition that I should abandon my views of the then situation of the truth about what had happened in the past. I believed then, and do now, that his views were totally wrong. I knew that he would have gone cheerfully to death in witness of them. I think he had a glimmer of the truth of my situation – and about me – then.[17]

Mac Colla acknowledges the importance of the influence his father had had over his early life through his careful descriptions of his earliest memories and observations of his family life in Montrose. Isobel Murray has noted: 'His parents were Plymouth Brethren, and strict ones: whenever he writes of them there is manifest pain, for Mac Colla both loved them and came to execrate their doctrines.'[18] It is clear from his personal and unpublished writing that he deeply loved his parents, and that his inability to accept or adhere to their strict religious beliefs did not necessarily lead to lasting tensions or a severe disruption in their relationship – but it is also clear that it was a source of difficulty and that any tensions which did arise were painful:

> My father was deadly serious about truth, and I know I had hurt him. In curious ways no father and son could have been closer. On occasions of parting, for instance when I was going off to the near East, he used to kiss me frankly and with much affection. And I returned his kiss with reverence – a most unheard-of thing in the Scotland of the time. Just the other day I wrote a few lines to one or two, too filled with their situation and supposed occupation as 'sons of the manse' –
>
> > My father was a preacher too
> > And an angelic man
> > Yet I never thought I owed it to his memory
> > To cling to what he preached[19]

His life growing up in Montrose and his relationship with his family which would inspire theories on the garnering of historical knowledge or historical truths through family experience and heritage, which will be examined later, is greatly important to a full study of his writing. He acknowledges the importance of this to an understanding

[17] Mac Colla, 1975, pp. 3-4.
[18] Isobel Murray, 'Fionn Mac Colla: Pilgrim of Independence', in *North East Review* 57, March, 1980, i-iii.
[19] NLS Dep. 265/17.

of his work in 'Mein Bumpf' when describing his methodical and perfectionist approach:

> This characteristic of meticulous and absolutely endless patience in matters of 'making', I inherit from both my parents, almost equally I fancy. In a sense they, and my grandparents before them, wrote my books: certainly without them they could not have been written. The genes are paramount.[20]

Mac Colla's family heritage is a blend of different 'Scotlands,' with the Northeast on his mother's side, and the Gaidhealtachd on his father's. This 'twofold heritage' is, of course, something which Mac Colla was continuously aware of and it can clearly be seen to have influenced him personally, inspiring his work through the employment of the different elements of Scottish culture and language he had inherited from both sides of his family. It is from this nurturing environment that his own connection to community, place, nation and culture is to be found. In 1935, with *The Albannach* published, and work on *And the Cock Crew* ongoing, Mac Colla contributed to George Scott Moncrieff's *Scottish Country* where he writes enthusiastically on the geography and scenery of Angus and the Mearns, and comments on what he saw as the ancient social history of the area, displaying once again, the relationship he saw between his own people, language and place: 'There are families in Angus whose names denote their descent from Scottic settlers known to have arrived considerably more than a millennium ago; and these it seems must be accounted among the comparative newcomers.'[21] The language of this place, in Mac Colla's time though, was not Gaelic. It should be acknowledged that, although his early books concentrate on Gaelic and the Highlands, the influence of Scots as a language is heavily present in later published work such as *Move Up, John*, and the short novella which forms one of its chapters, *Scottish Noel*. Of course, the Factor, Mr. Byars in *And the Cock Crew*

[20] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p. 11.
[21] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Angus and Mearns', in *Scottish Country*, ed. by George Scott Moncrieff, (Wishart: Wishart Books, 1935), 99-117, (p.102).

speaks broad Scots throughout. As well as his Gaelic paternity, Mac Colla was keenly aware of the ancient family connections that also rooted him to the Angus 'peasant folk' from whom he was descended through his mother. His intimate knowledge of the North East prompted him to later take issue with the most famous writer of the Mearns, Lewis Grassic Gibbon, with what he perceived to be an inaccurate representation of the Mearns people in *A Scots Quair*. Gibbon is 'unkind' and 'misrepresents the Mearns peasant', he writes in *Too Long in This Condition*: 'I am a Mearns peasant; my Douglas ancestors were there or thereaboot for uncounted centuries; and it was among the Mearns peasants that I heard again and again as a principal rule of life, Fowk should be kind to fowk! Also, Mearns – Mearns and North Angus – Scots was my first language and I do not think that Gibbon's rendering of it is quite "true"; his speech to my ear is from farther north.'[22] Mac Colla's concern at the misrepresentation of the 'speak' of the Mearns and the geographical accuracy of Gibbon's dialect, are, however, 'minor matters beside the substantive merits of his books', and he does not overly criticise Gibbon's style – this simply serves to highlight the relationship Mac Colla saw himself as having with the North-East. Mac Colla saw this place as his home. Despite praising Gibbon's work, he does address a sore point at the public's reception of Gibbon and his ideas: 'What incensed me at the time – and still does among his uncritical and unqualified acolytes – is that the admiration which should be shown for his literary merits, is poured out, positively to drooling, on his supposed "ideas", which when they are not puerile are incorrect'. This is merely an example of how Mac Colla viewed what he considered to be the cultural inaccuracies of contemporary Scottish writers who portray a marketable, 'authentic' Scotland (that is, one with the illusion of 'realism') at the expense of a

[22] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 5.

genuinely realistic one – in Mac Colla's words: '… to come to grips with the realities of the situation of the Gael in his day.'[23] It also highlights huge importance he placed on these issues, place and community, and their relation to language, whether Scots or Gaelic, and the seriousness with which he approached such matters. He makes his claims from a socially informed and sound cultural position regarding the Mearns, but the point of including this criticism here is not to dispute Gibbon's renderings, but to demonstrate Mac Colla's most serious concern in noting that cultural and historical 'truths' were constantly in danger of being misrepresented and distorted:

> As to his picture of hard and unrewarded toil of the land, he was speaking of the Howe o the Mearns, a northern extension of Strathmore, one of the most fertile agricultural regions of Britain. He seemed to shut his eyes entirely to the fact that in no country in the world does one pursue the calling of agriculture successfully from a feather-bed, even if mobile. Yet nothing less would have satisfied him about Scotland apparently, where everything was simply a 'hard chyauve' … We are a nation which has slowly died because of a lie in the mind and the will; in whose case, therefore, there is a desperate need for truth and strict accuracy, for well-considered, well-based judgements about our past. Of this sort of responsibility Grassic Gibbon knew nothing. He was one of those – not alone unfortunately in Scotland – who had only to huff and puff and what came out was Truth, for the reason that he had huffed and puffed it: thus, with persons of the kind, is Truth constituted. He used to infuriate me by the utterly irresponsible, jocular references to historical matters he threw off in the letters he wrote at the time when some of us were trying to run *The Free Man* – as if the truth of history didn't matter.[24]

'Truth' is not subjective in this context, but it can be radicalised for personal gain to the detriment of nation and culture; such radicalisation can be politically motivated or simply inaccurate. From the Kirk, the school, or through literature itself, such cultural and historical distortions are constituents of the political landscape in Scotland. Although Mac Colla's North East connections are not the central focus of this thesis, the brief section above demonstrates how he viewed the connections between place, people and history, and displays his utter conviction in them, as elements which can

[23] Fionn Mac Colla, *The Albannach* (London: Souvenir Press, 1932; rep. 1984), I.

[24] Mac Colla, 1975, pp. 5-6.

define an overall 'truth' of what might be described as the distinctive psychology of the Scots. Indeed, it was as a 'Pilgrim of Truth' that he defined his own life. Certainly, there is a need for a deeper study of MacColla's North East connections and influences than can be accommodated here, though this development of Mac Colla's awareness of himself as a writer has never been considered before.

Gaeldom: 'My Roots in the Soil of Alba'[25]

It is traditional among Gaelic families to name the father's son after that father's father. In keeping with this, Thomas Douglas Macdonald was named after his grandfather, Thomas McDonald, born 1839. Mac Colla's great grandfather, Donald McDonald, born c1799, passed his name on to Mac Colla's father, Donald McDonald, born 1874. Here, a brief background of Mac Colla's paternal family history will be provided, which takes in these four generations of McDonald men, in order to determine the influence that his Gaelic heritage, through these familial links, had on his work. This is a completely new approach. In an unpublished transcript of audio notes on the Jacobite rising of 1745, Mac Colla details a theory on the importance of such familial links to 'experiencing' history, highlighting, again, his conviction of the importance of familial influence and heritage:

> This point about how true historical knowledge can be acquired – there is for instance the '45…important point here…after all, I remember my father's voice – I can still hear my father's voice – and his grandfather was a contemporary with or 'out' in the '45. And just as I for instance in my childhood was contemporary with quite large numbers of men who had been in the Crimean war, so the tone of voice…watch this here…the tone of voice conveying the essence of the reality of a past event…the intonation…everything else deriving from the essence of it…would be transmitted down the line, down the generations, in tones of voice and intonations which were and still are…which were familiar to me in

[25] A quote from Murdo Anderson in *The Albannach*, p. 79.

> childhood…I therefore know the '45 period to this extent, just as mere delvers among documents do not know the '45 and never could.[26]

The importance that is placed here on the 'essence of the reality of a past event' passed down the generations through 'tones of voice and intonations' and Mac Colla's inculcation of the perspective that such perception gave him into his work, forms a basis for this next section. For Mac Colla, the tone of voice, the tonal articulation of the human perception of an experience, is used to define the taste or flavour (in Gaelic, the word is 'blas') of a past reality. This provides an understanding of the truths of history which carries beyond the experience of one lifetime. It is, arguably, the most natural and widespread method for acquiring 'historical knowledge' and is of particular relevance given the oral nature of Gaelic culture. Mac Colla then, may have claimed not to have seen the importance in 'trivial' aspects of his own life, but the experiences of generations of Macdonald men were passed down to him and were given a voice in his writing and these experiences cannot be considered trivial. In adapting such a traditional Bardic role, Mac Colla presents himself as a cultural translator, writing fluently about Gaelic cultural matters and channelling this through the medium of English – to reach a wider audience. There is no great tradition of novel-writing in Gaelic. Mac Colla, adapting again, takes what is traditionally an English-language form to present a Gaelic subject matter. It was his intention to flavour the language he used in his books with the Gaelic tones and inflections that he was familiar with in order to present the contemporary history of the Gael to an English-speaking population in as realistic a way possible.

Examples of his intentions for the presentation of language and his motivations behind it are discussed in the introduction to re-published editions of *The Albannach*, though it is interesting to note that *Move Up, John* (1994), confirms more

[26] NLS Dep 265/46.

concisely how Mac Colla presented the different uses of language in his books. Putting it simply, he writes in the preface to *Move Up, John* that: 'Where conversations are not obviously in Braid Scots (called English up till the century of this book) it is to be understood that they are in the Scottish or Gaelic language.' His intention is to explore a Gaelic world or experience in all of his writing, even in the Reformation novel, *Move Up, John*, this experience is made manifest through the direction to the reader that Gaelic is the common language in use. Presenting such an experience as realistic in English is difficult, but as will be seen in the next chapter, the focus on the 'idioms' of Gaelic speech 'translated' into English in *The Albannach* is an area which marks Mac Colla's work and reinforces the focus he places on history, place and language. It is precisely because the novel has no tangible traditions in Gaelic culture that Mac Colla is able to present such a statement as to what the truth of a Gaelic experience in literature could be. It is certainly testament to his determination when we consider his creed – that this reality 'can not be attained save through the window of the Gaidhlig.'[27] It must be considered then, that Mac Colla never intended to present a single, or definitive Gaelic experience through his writing. His writing is, rather, an assiduous 'translation' of the Gaelic experience. It is an interpretation. Most people, readers of English around the world, simply cannot see Mac Colla's ideas through this 'window'. There are difficulties with these issues, not least the role that Mac Colla adopts as a writer engaging with one culture while writing in the language of another. As the noted linguist George Steiner has commented:

> As he sets out, the translator must gamble on the coherence, on the symbolic plenitude of the world. Concomitantly he leaves himself vulnerable, though only in extremity and at the theoretical edge, to two dialectically related, mutually determined metaphysical risks. He may find that 'anything' or

[27] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 56.

> 'almost anything' can mean 'everything' ... or he may find that there is 'nothing there' which can be divorced from its formal autonomy, that every meaning worth expressing is monadic and will not enter into any alternative world.[28]

It is impossible to describe Mac Colla as a translator *literally* – his work is mostly written in English. Perhaps to translate his work into Gaelic would be a worthwhile experiment, but as it is, it is also impossible to accuse him of misinterpreting the Gaelic situation or experience in this context as he was writing from a position of knowledge and experience of Gaelic. The decision to write so passionately about Gaelic in English displays the difficult cultural paradox of Gaelic in the modern age. The question remains as to whether such a novel in Gaelic would be more 'realistic' or 'authentic' than an English version.

Mac Colla's claim to 'know the '45' is important here for two reasons: first, the failure of the '45 was instrumental in fundamentally altering Gaelic culture and language. Secondly, in highlighting this event to demonstrate this particular philosophy of 'knowing history', Mac Colla directly places his own family at the centre of this upheaval and its aftermath. Mac Colla's attitude to history and historical fact was that it is crucial to know about the historical context surrounding an issue before one can appropriately discuss the issue itself. Given the importance he placed on the influence of his antecedents, as we have already seen, it is necessary to understand a little about the historical context of Mac Colla's paternal family.

The aftermath of Culloden led to an outlawing of recognised symbols of Highland origin; in effect, a concentrated suppression of Gaelic culture was instigated in order to safeguard the union and the crown from further Jacobite-inspired instability. In his examination of Gaelic society, *The Making of the Crofting*

[28] George Steiner, *After Babel* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 297.

Community (2000), James Hunter notes that: 'In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as in more modern times, traditional societies which were felt to stand in the way of English or British interests were habitually destroyed.'[29] The traditional Gaelic societies of the Highlands, with various devoutly Jacobite clans, were dealt with accordingly. Far from being 'a singularly unfortunate prelude to a future renewal of hostilities',[30] Culloden proved decisive:

> In 1746 and in the years that followed … a concerted attempt was made to integrate – forcibly where necessary – the Highlands into a country from which they had hitherto kept aloof. For example, clansmen, both Jacobite and non-Jacobite, were disarmed finally and completely, the wearing of Highland dress was prohibited, and chiefs' judicial powers over their clans were abolished.[31]

The effect on Gaelic culture was immense. Its impact was sustained, and it developed at a quickening pace – it reached Mac Colla's generation and beyond. Through Mac Colla's own philosophy, this experience directly influenced an angry sense of violation in his writing. Much of it is indeed inspired through this shared Gaelic experience. For this reason alone, it is worth spending some time tracking through Mac Colla's paternal family history. Moreover, this will establish an intimate and personal heritage across generations through history and languages, directly into the novels. It informs them with biographical urgency in palpable and strengthening ways.

Mac Colla's great grandfather, Donald McDonald, was born in or around 1799, in the parish of Urray, in Strathconon. The census records for 1851 show that he was a 'farmer of 7 acres', 51 years old and living in the parish of Killearnan,

[29] James Hunter, *The Making of The Crofting Community* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976; rep. 2000), p. 42.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., p. 43.

married to Betsy McDonald, with four children.[32] The youngest, Mac Colla's grandfather Thomas, is listed as being 10. The parish of Urray, in the Strathconon estate, is located just west of the Black Isle in Easter Ross, and this area of the Highlands was an early test-bed for the 'improvements' of Clearance through the attempted relocation of the native population and the introduction of the more profitable sheep. The 'year of the sheep' or 'Bliadhna nan Caorach', is noted as a particularly violent example:

> This had already occurred further south, but it had done so gradually and where the rural peasantry had access to an alternative livelihood among people who spoke their own language. As the process spread through the southern Highlands it caused increasing hardship and social dislocation. By the time it passed the Great Glen it amounted to genocide and caused the violence of 1792, remembered as the Year of the Sheep. Hundreds of the natives of Ross-shire, joined by others from Sutherland, attempted to drive out the sheep from the pastures on which they had formerly kept their cattle. Troops were called in; the ring-leaders were brought to trial; resistance was crushed.[33]

By the early 19th century then, the idea of such relocation was becoming commonplace across Scotland. In his *A History of the Highland Clearances* (1982), Eric Richards notes James Hogg's experiences in this area during a trip to the Highlands in 1803-4:

> Hogg registered the extent of the sheep empire through the eyes of a lowland tourist and farmer. The Cheviot, he discovered, had reached the estates of the Duke of Argyll. In Easter Ross most of the Strathconon estate had been already laid out as sheep-walks, apart from a small part at the lower end which had been 'reserved for the accommodation of such of the natives as could not dispose of themselves to better advantage.' It was a sign of the tenacity of these people that, several decades later, they still occupied this remnant of their old lands and, in a later clearance, became the subject of great public outcry against their evicting landlord.[34]

[32] 1851 census, Parish of Killearnan.
[33] Ian Grimble, 'Clearances', in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick Thomson (Glasgow: Gairm, 1983; rep. 1994), 44-47, (p.46).
[34] Eric Richards, *A History of Highland Clearances: Agrarian Transformation and the Evictions 1746-1886* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982), p. 209.

Mac Colla's great grandfather was born during this time of social upheaval. As a boy, these severe social changes were commonplace in the Strathconon area, and Urray, which lies at the eastern end of the Strathconon estate, was by all accounts one of the few remaining areas not completely cleared by the time of his birth. The ruined townships of nearby parishes would have been, for the first time in the Highlands, a fixture of the area's topography. This particularly Gaelic experience – the Highland Clearances – is at the centre of Mac Colla's second novel, *And the Cock Crew*. Given Mac Colla's theoretical approach to instinctively 'knowing' or 'understanding' history, it is no great leap to connect the experiences of his great-grandfather to the motivation behind writing novels with such Gaelic cultural focus. It must be noted that Mac Colla gives no direct indication that his great grandfather's life was a source of inspiration in his work, though given the number of Gaels displaced during the Clearances, his story would not have been so unique as to discount similarities to many other accounts of Clearance throughout the Gaidhealtachd. The impact, both psychological and cultural, was widespread in Gaelic society. The impending disaster which looms over the fictional townspeople of Glen Luachrach in *And the Cock Crew* is an account of Clearance, but it is the portrayal of the psychological aspect that such an experience has which demonstrates Mac Colla's particular 'understanding' of the event.

Today, the Gaidhealtachd is sometimes referred to as one of Europe's last great wildernesses, but this is only true insomuch as wilderness began to take hold with the spread of the Clearances in Mac Colla's great grandfather's lifetime. He was a child during this early phase of Clearance. In the later, more devastating Strathconon Clearances of the 1830s, his own young family would suffer directly. Generations later, Mac Colla felt and understood that the wilderness that the

Highlands had become by his own time was man-made. The loss of the people, the Gaels gone from the Gaidhealtachd, the effect on their language and culture: all of this affected him personally. As he records in a notebook towards the end of his life: '… looking at the vast empty hills all about, emptiness you could almost hear – all the sense, all the same, of na daoine a dh'fhalbh, daoine a b'fhabhaist a bhi ann[35] – my enormously strong sense of *their* life gave me an equally augmented sense of my *own* …'[36] Mac Colla's personal history is central to his work. A study of it in this context is entirely new.

There are schools of thought which remove the Clearances some way from the cultural devastation which they ultimately generated by focusing on the economic and social improvements which are synonymous with modern capitalist notions of progress. Such an examination of the period is not the aim of this thesis, but it is necessary to make it clear nonetheless that there are mixed reactions to interpretations of the Clearances. The transition of Chieftains to landed gentry led to their being known as 'improvers'. As James Hunter notes, this was 'the term the new breed of modernising and commercialising landlords liked to apply to themselves.'[37] The 'improvements' taking place across the Highlands, however, appear at the least, to represent a detached authority unsympathetic to the situation of the Gaels. More often, they appear to have been orientated around profit masked by notions of improvement, as opposed to any altruistic sense of compassion. Various opposing schools react against each other in equally exaggerated fashion – the Clearances are discussed as acts of genocide or, conversely, as a badly needed solution to this poverty-stricken and over-populated region of the Union. Whatever the machinations

[35] [Translation] 'The people who left, the people who used to be there'
[36] NLS Dep 239/12/f 'Notes on Gaelic'.
[37] Hunter, 2000, p. 46.

of various landowners, Gaelic undeniably suffered as a direct result of the Highland Clearances, and this is what makes this period so crucial in Mac Colla's work.[38]

The Parish of Urray is a fine example of an area of the Highlands settled and sustained by its population. According to the Statistical Account of Scotland, two rivers converge in Urray, the Orrin and the Conon: 'The Orrin has, in the course of ages, evidently shifted its bed, and its passable fords, through every part of that plain, and would repeat its ravages almost every season, were it not restrained by the annual exertions of the surrounding proprietors.'[39] In Michael Fry's *Wild Scots: Four Hundred Years of Highland History* (2005), the spirit of the improver is conjured through various accounts of the period. In one such example, the Scottish military figure, author and rent collector Edmund Burt is used as an example which highlights the poverty-stricken Gaidhealtachd as a general homogeny, in dire need of improvement:

> Edmund Burt, again sounding like a traveller to Africa today, felt shocked to find so many filthy, ragged, barefoot, verminous, scabby, pot-bellied waifs in the north: 'I have often seen them come out of the huts early in a cold morning and squat themselves down (if I may decently use the comparison) like dogs on a dunghill.' They were 'strangely neglected till they are six or seven years old'; it could not have been worth wasting affection on them before they proved they were going to survive infancy. [40]

[38] Although it is outside the scope of this thesis to present a full account of the Clearances, it must be acknowledged that this period in Highland history has since been the subject of a great deal of scholarly criticism. The transformation of the political, social and cultural conditions in the Highlands is complicated and the process was lengthy. As T.M. Devine notes: 'Gaelic society and clanship were in decay long before the later eighteenth century. However, in the 1760s and 1770s there was a marked acceleration in the rate of social change and, in subsequent decades, material, cultural and demographic forces combined to produce a dramatic revolution in the Highland way of life. In simple terms, traditional society was destroyed in this period and a new order based on quite different values, principles and relationships emerged to take its place.' T.M. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish* Highlands (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.32. The full economic and societal upheaval cannot be neatly encompassed here, but the impact of this transformation on the generations who lived through it and on the generations who followed, is the position from which Mac Colla, as a novelist, examines the psychological damage done by the Clearances.

[39] *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799*- vol. XXII, p.668.

[40] Michael Fry, *Wild Scots: Four Hundred Years of Highland History* (London: John Murray, 2006), p.154.

The Statistical Account, however, describes the area under particular consideration here as one which has been cultivated by its inhabitants, and appears to be an agricultural success: '… The two beautiful Firths of Dingwall and Beauly, which, as canals formed by the hand of nature, and penetrating for upwards of 20 miles into a populous country, invite the merchant and manufacturer to settle on their banks – the soil is … on the whole, … warm, dry, and productive.'[41] The population appears healthy in this part of the Highlands in an era before the introduction of the national census: 'From a roll made up in 1791, there are in the parish 1860 persons, of whom 420 are under 10 years of age.'[42] The picture is one of a prosperous and fertile Highland Parish; indeed, one of the most fertile: '... In the district of which this [Urray] is a part, from Inverness to Dingwall, grain [fell] higher than in any other place in the north of Scotland.'[43] Preceding crofting, the land was farmed openly rather than through individual holdings, and the great body of the people could be divided into two classes: 'tenants and cottagers' or as they were known in this area, tenants and 'mailers.' It is to this latter class that Donald McDonald belonged, and with the influx of migrants to the area from the West coast and the Hebrides during the mid eighteenth century, it is likely that his family had settled in Urray at some point during the 40 years preceding the census roll taken in 1791 when the population was noted at '248 families, of whom 148 [had] settled within the last 40 years.'[44]

The McDonald family were tradesmen with the family business of shoemaking passed from father to son; Mac Colla's father Donald was a shoemaker[45] and Mac Colla's grandfather, Thomas, a mason and a shoemaker[46] and the Statistical

[41] *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799- vol. XVII*, p. 669.
[42] Ibid., p. 676.
[43]Ibid., p.670-71.
[44] Ibid., p.677.
[45] Census record, Montrose, 1901.
[46] Census record, Inverness, 1891.

Account notes: 'All the tradesmen in the parish are included among the mailers. They consist of 20 weavers, 1 house-carpenter, 3 millers, 15 taylors, 2 masons, 21 *brogue* or shoemakers.'[47] The conclusions drawn from the records shown here connect Mac Colla to a distinctly Highland and Gaelic lineage through his paternal family and it is this family's experience, across generations, that inspired his Gaelic-themed work. With his roots firmly in the soil of the Gaelic-speaking Highlands, Mac Colla was well placed to deal with Gaelic cultural and social themes.[48] Only three generations before his birth, his great grandfather was a mailer living in a prosperous Gaelic-speaking parish which was soon to be displaced by the Highland Clearances, and it is not difficult to see how these experiences would be drawn upon by a writer so personally affected by history and Gaelic society.

It is difficult to gauge exactly when the McDonald family were cleared from Urray, as the Clearances of the area took place periodically during the 1830s and 40s. However, it is possible to ascertain that a large group of inhabitants were removed from Urray in 1834, when a general Clearance took place. These people were accommodated by Colin McKenzie of Kilcoy in the nearby parish of Killearnan, increasing the population of this area with the incoming evictees.

> This increase (1831-1479, + 100 from 1821) arises from the accommodation given by Colin MacKenzie of Kilcoy, on his properties in the parish, to tenants removed from the estate of Redcastle; and also, in a more especial manner, from the encouragement which the same gentleman gives to strangers expelled from various parts of the Highlands, to settle on his portion of the late Mill Bui commonty, and on other woodlands on his property of Tore – where they are accommodated on liberal terms, and where it is expected they may make for themselves, in a few years, pretty comfortable settlements.[49]

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[47] Ibid.
[48] *The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799*- vol. xvii, p. 682- 'Gaelic is the vernacular language of the whole parish, [Urray] except in gentlemen's families. Several of the inhabitants read the English Bible , and can transact business in that language; but they, as well as the bulk of the people, prefer religious instruction in Gaelic; and are therefore at pains to read the Gaelic New Testament, and Psalm Book, &c.'
[49] *New Statistical Account Of Scotland* XIV Ross and Cromarty, 66-67

Despite the apparent generosity and good will of Mackenzie of Kilcoy, within a generation the tenants on this estate were facing similar problems. In order to pinpoint the date of the McDonald family's eviction and to demonstrate the hardships faced by those who were displaced, it is possible to illuminate the scene with reference to evidence given at the Napier Commission by one Finlay Mackay, a crofter of Mulbuie: 'The place [Mulbuie] was first colonised about the year 1834, when a general clearance in Strathconon under gross circumstances sent the people adrift, and a number of them, my late father among the rest, settled here.'[50] It is extremely likely then, that the McDonald family were among the people cleared from Strathconon 'under gross circumstances' in 1834 and offered settlement in Killearnan by Colin Mackenzie. In the 1841 census record,[51] the McDonald family are living in Tore Wood, in the parish of Killearnan, with Mac Colla's grandfather, Thomas, listed as being 1 year old, born in Tore. In the 1851 census record, his place of birth is also listed as being Tore.[52] Further evidence shows that Donald McDonald's eldest daughter, Mac Colla's' great aunt, Betsy, was born in Urray in 1833, with the next child, Alexander, born in the parish of Killearnan.

The Strathconon Clearances were particularly notable for their duration and for the sheer numbers expelled from their homes. From relatively small scale expulsions in the early years of the 1830s, the Clearances of Strathconon grew in scale and continued to the 1840s when they reached their peak:

> From 1840-1848 Strathconon was almost entirely cleared of its ancient inhabitants to make room for sheep and deer, as in other places, it was also for the purposes of extensive forest plantations … A great many … found shelter on various properties in the Black Isle – some at Drynie park, Maol-Bui; others at Kilcoy, Allangrange, Cromarty and the Aird. It is computed that

[50] Napier Commission, Evidence, vol. 4 (1884), p. 2668 paragraph 40891.
[51] Census record, parish of Killearnan, 1841
[52] Census record, parish of Killearnan, 1851

> from four to five hundred souls were thus driven from Strathconon, and cast adrift on the world …[53]

The Strathconon estate had been a prosperous holding for those who had lived there. After the evictions, they made prosperous the areas of the Black Isle where they had settled, and proved themselves to be resilient and adaptable, though given the circumstances they had little choice: '…The excellent agricultural condition into which they in after years brought their small holdings, is a standing refutation of the charge so often made against the Highland people, that they are lazy and incapable of properly cultivating the land.'[54] It is, perhaps, no small wonder that it is possible to trace a writer like Fionn Mac Colla's family to such an experience. During the era before the Clearances it can be seen as an example of a prosperous and functioning Gaelic community: 'perhaps no glen of its size in the Highlands had a larger population than Strathconon.'[55] This element of Gaelic community is celebrated retrospectively in *And the Cock Crew*.

Some of the people cleared from this area had been accommodated elsewhere, as has been noted. However, their toil at the cultivation of new land only increased their plight. An interview with another crofter, Kenneth Davidson of Upper Knockbain on the Kilcoy Estate, demonstrates how the lot of the evictees from Strathconon had not improved in the 50 years since their relocation:

> We are obliged to leave our crofts at certain seasons of the year, to work on the large farms, for the purpose of enabling us to pay the rent, and thus satisfy the rent-demanding propensities of the landlord […] Land, arable and pasture, has been taken from us and despoiled by the proprietor, for the loss of which we have neither received any reduction of rent or compensation […] Whenever we improve the land the rent is raised.[56]

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[53] Alexander Mackenzie, *The Highland Clearances* (Inverness: [n.p.], 1883), p. 308-309.
[54] Ibid., p. 310.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Napier Commisson, Evidence, volume 4,(1884), pp.2663-4, paragraph 40821.

For the McDonald family, now living in Killearnan, the threat of eviction had not passed. In less than a generation, large, prosperous Gaelic communities had been dispersed, and with these evictions, the serious threat of the decline of traditional Gaelic culture began to take shape. The long-term results of deprivations suffered by these people is represented in modern Scotland in *The Albannach*; then, the immediate conflict of the Clearances itself is the subject of *And the Cock Crew*, where the Clearances are dealt with directly, and described in a manner fitting the sense of injustice suffered at the hands of the landowners.[57] This is a particularly bitter period for the native demographic of the Highlands of Scotland. In the case of Mac Colla's family, having already been moved to Killearnan, they now faced the prospect of being cleared again as the landowners were keen to use all improved land for their own profit. The once prosperous area was blighted by over-population as a direct result of earlier clearance:

> The Clearances are still spoken of as a comparatively recent event, by the older generation of residents in Killearnan. Some can still tell of the deprivations suffered by once prosperous families turned out of Strathconon, of their ill-made and hastily erected tents on the Millbuie, and of their battle with cold, hunger and illness. In 1831 the population of Killearnan given in a statistical statement, was 1479 but with the coming of the people of Strathconon it had increased in 1841 to 1643 people; and in 1851, to 1794 people. Some broke in the harsh heathland of the Millbuie while others found shelter at Kilcoy and Allangrange. However, evictions later started in Killearnan, great numbers being turned wholesale off the land. For the Strathconon settlers a double blow – a second eviction.[58]

Mac Colla's own Gaelic family history can be interpreted as a microcosm of the wider Highlands and the fate of the Gaelic-speaking communities there. Displaced from

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[57] See Rob Gibson, *The Highland Clearances Trail* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2006), p. 44.
It is interesting to note the family involved in much of the devastating Clearances of Strathconon: 'The Balfours, a very rich family of Lowland merchants, cleared the extensive glen in several stages in the 1840s […] The son of the Clearance laird, AJ Balfour, became secretary of state for Scotland in the critical period of the Crofter's Wars and later became British Tory Prime Minister'.
[58] Margaret Oag, *Killearnan: The History of the Parish* (Ross and Cromarty Enterprises, 1966; rep. 1997), p.20.

Urray, the family settled in Killearnan only to find themselves under threat of eviction once again. It is difficult to ascertain if the family endured further displacement, but it is certain that the children of Donald McDonald followed the diaspora of other Gaels, leaving the glens for the larger towns and cities of the south.

In the 1861 census, Mac Colla's grandfather, Thomas McDonald, born in Tore, Killearnan, to a family of evictees from Urray, is listed as being 20 years old, lodging at 37 High street, Dundee, and is a trainee shoemaker. After marrying, he returned to the Highlands, and settled at 185 Friars Street, Inverness. Inverness at this time was home to a great number of Gaelic speakers and we can be certain that Thomas McDonald and his family were among them by the record of the 1881 census (the first to include questions on Gaelic), where Thomas and his wife Elizabeth are listed as having both Gaelic and English.

The Gaelic language had begun its steady decline in the era immediately following the Clearances, and back in the parish of Killearnan, English had already begun to creep into common usage:

> The language of the natives is Gaelic; and the greatest portion of the inhabitants can receive religious instruction through no other medium. The Gaelic, however, may be considered as on the decline. Nearly the whole of the young people understand and speak English well. And of late years, and in consequence of the new system of farming introduced, converting large tracts of land into one farm, strangers have come amongst us, who do not understand Gaelic, and must therefore bring along with them from other parts servants who can understand them.[59]

With the McDonald family's settling in Inverness, they joined countless others from across the Highlands. Indeed, just around the corner from the dutifully named Friars Street, lay the conversely named Maggot Row, where the woman who would become

[59] *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, XIV, Ross and Cromarty, p. 67.

the great Gaelic bard and songstress of the Clearances, Maìri Mhòr nan Òran (1821 – 1898) was a resident.

When Mac Colla talks of 'tones of voice and intonations' passing through the generations, he does not mention language specifically. However, it is important to observe that if the language and the culture it conveys are under threat, then the significance of the inheritance becomes even more powerful. For Fionn Mac Colla, the significance of his Gaelic history and identity and its condition, was passed across the generations of his father's family; and these experiences were awakened in his two major novels.

'…The History of Myself, Directed by Myself': The Place of Gunn and MacDiarmid

The obituary for Thomas Joseph Douglas MacDonald in *The Glasgow Herald*, 22 July 1975, recalls of his career that:

> He first came to prominence as the author of the definitive novel "The Albannach," which was the first novel to deal with contemporary life in the West Highlands with harsh realism as opposed to pure romance. "And the Cock Crew" became a classic of the clearances, and "Scottish Noel" was also acclaimed.[60]

The short column from which this paragraph is taken acknowledges the importance of Mac Colla's best-known works, but it certainly falls short as a commemoration for a man whose contribution to the Scottish cultural renaissance was so important. It typifies, however, the general attitude to what was a distinguished, yet still under-appreciated, literary career. Mac Colla's work was critically acclaimed and well received, but he would spend his life never quite achieving the prominence or recognition which many felt he had deserved, and this justifiably left him with what

[60] Obituary, 'Fionn MacColla', in *Glasgow Herald*, 22 July 1975, p.6.

J.B. Caird defines as a sense of 'embitterment and disappointment.'[61] The September following Mac Colla's death, his one time neighbour, Hugh MacDiarmid[62], published an altogether more personal tribute, remembering him as: '… the young writer known to me of the greatest potentiality as a creative writer.'[63] Published in the *Scots Independent*, and entitled 'Scottish Spirit Incarnate', MacDiarmid discusses the great achievement of Mac Colla's contribution to Scottish literature: '… His novel, *The Albannach* … I thought (and still think) by far the most radical of all writings dealing with our suppressed Gaelic nationality … His death is a great loss to Scottish literature – greater, I am certain, than the deaths of Compton Mackenzie, Neil Gunn, Eric Linklater, George Scott Moncrieff put together.'[64] It is easy to view this statement as hyperbolic and even contentious, and such reactions would be an accurate enough annotation of Mac Colla's combative and quarrelsome career – especially the direction it took in the early days through his relationship with MacDiarmid and some of the other writers whom MacDiarmid names in 'Scottish Spirit Incarnate'.

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[61] James B. Caird, 'Fionn MacColla', *Edinburgh Review*, 74 (1986), 50-57, (p.53).

[62] Mac Colla notes in *Too Long in this Condition*, p.80, that: 'On my return to Scotland [after teaching in Palestine] I naturally made first for Montrose, where one of my first acts was to renew personal acquaintance with Hugh MacDiarmid. It wasn't difficult; he lived next door…To be precise we were in No. 12 Links Avenue, Aunt Annie in 14, and C.M. Grieve in 16". MacDiarmid himself notes of their acquaintance that: 'It soon became clear that a very deep division was about to manifest itself between us. He became a Roman Catholic and I a Communist […] it became impossible for us to meet; and indeed before he died, at the age of 69, we had not seen each other or communicated for many years (Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scottish Spirit Incarnate',
Scots Independent, September 1975, p. 8).
However, MacDiarmid had written a letter, dated 25 June 1975, to Mac Colla while Mac Colla was ill in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary in which he expresses his pleasure at the publication of David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* and the production of a television program about him. The tone is conciliatory. MacDiarmid says: 'Our ideas may be far apart in many ways but I have always wished you well and, while knowing all the difficulties, hoped you'd find a way through them and get your books published…Be sure I'll be hoping to hear good news of you soon.' MacDonald died less than a month later. (Hugh MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters*, ed. by Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001), p. 493). It is also interesting to note that Mac Colla writes on the influence, or lack of, MacDiarmid had on his work: 'We left Montrose together [for London, while Mac Colla was engaged in writing *The Albannach*] in the summer of 1929…Then or later there was no 'influence'. The history of my intellectual development was the history of myself, directed by myself' (NLS, Dep 265/33).

[63] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scottish Spirit Incarnate', *Scots Independent*, September 1975, p. 8.

[64] Ibid.

Given Mac Colla's strong views concerning traditionally contentious Scottish issues like the Church, national sovereignty and 'suppressed Gaelic nationality', it is possible to see why some at the time approached his writing with cynicism, if not hostility. Public reviews for his first book *The Albannach* (1932), which shall be examined in detail in the following chapter are – sometimes – less than favourable; at other times, they are insulting and abusive. Often, this appears to have more to do with his subject matter than his style or ability, and such reviews may account for his lack of great public success. Despite this, he attracted great acclaim from what could be considered more professional and academic circles; as we have seen, Hugh MacDiarmid was an early enthusiast for Mac Colla's work and was of the opinion that Mac Colla had been unfairly maligned to a degree by certain sections of the reading public as a result of unfair criticism in the press.

From the earliest years of their acquaintance, MacDiarmid publicly stated that it was Mac Colla's intellectualism which had discouraged a culturally suppressed (even ignorant) public, and that this made him a target for unsympathetic rivals. In an accusing letter to Neil Gunn, for example, he proclaims that Mac Colla's career had been '… kept back or denied outlet by "a horde of his intellectual inferiors" in the Scottish movement.'[65] In Mac Colla, MacDiarmid believed that 'the Scottish Highlands had at last found an eloquent voice and appropriately angry fictional form'[66] and so, 'shortly thereafter Grieve was acclaiming Mac Colla publicly as *the* novelist of the Highlands'.[67] Such claims would not have endeared Mac Colla to particular sections of the literary movement. The often-difficult relationship between these prominent figures is beyond the scope of this work, though it should be noted

[65] Neil Gunn, *Selected Letters*, ed. by J.B. Pick, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987), p.19.
[66] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid', ed. by Alan Bold (London: Hamilton, 1985), p. 566.
[67] F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life* (London: John Murray, 1981), p. 99.

that Mac Colla was later of the suspicion that Gunn had 'appropriated' his idea for a historical novel on the Clearances. He touches on the matter briefly in 'Mein Bumpf':

> I remember J.H. Whyte [the wealthy Jewish-American with Scottish connections who was proprietor and editor of *The Modern Scot*] asking me one evening late in 1930, while we were sitting on either side of his fire, and I was still writing *The Albannach*, if I had any ideas in mind for a novel to follow it. I replied, yes; and went on to tell him about the Clearances and Evictions, which were as much news to him as in those days they would have been to the feck of my fellow countrymen. I pointed out that there were dramatic possibilities there and said I intended to write a novel about them as soon as my hands were free of *The Albannach*. Whyte did not treat the information as a confidence. To my surprise I shortly thereafter saw a news item to the effect that I was actually engaged on a novel about the Clearances in a Glasgow newspaper edited by the late John MacNair Reid,[68] who had been introduced to me as a great personal friend and admirer of a young writer, Neil M. Gunn, then coming to be known as the novelist of the Grey Coast of Caithness and Sutherland.[69]

As is evidenced in Gunn's biography *A Highland Life* (1981) MacDiarmid would later go so far as to directly claim that, 'Neil's friends were obstructing Mac Colla's career'.[70] Despite the support of a major figure like MacDiarmid, it cannot but be speculative as to how much public and professional damage Mac Colla may have actually suffered through such vociferous claims in defence of his literary position and abilities at such an early stage in his career. Mac Colla himself discusses his relationship with Neil Gunn publicly to a small extent[71] but it is from an unpublished journal of his writings that a better understanding of his experiences with Gunn and of his own feelings as an outsider in this literary environment can be more fully understood. Of Gunn, he begins, '…as a novelist he was whatever you will; as a

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[68] It is interesting to note that John MacNair Reid (Colin Walkinshaw), then Editor of the *Glasgow Evening Times*, later wrote and published a scathing review of *The Albannach*, containing a great deal of inaccuracy coupled with personal attacks on the integrity of its author. The review is examined in the next chapter. See 'Pig's Eyes in Alba' by John MacNair Reid, in *Evening Times*, 16 June, 1932, p.2. Mac Colla mentions MacNair Reid throughout his autobiography. Mac Colla sums up their relationship as such: 'Of course, Reid was a man for the Kirk: I always preferred Truth' (Mac Colla, 1975, p. 42).

[69] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, pp. 24-5.

[70] Hart and Pick, 1981, 99.

[71] See Mac Colla, (1975), *Ro Fhada Mar So a Tha Mi*, Hart and Pick, *Neil M Gunn: A Highland Life*, (1984) and 'Mein Bumpf', in *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, ed. by David Morrison (1973).

Highland novelist he was bogus.'[72] A particular anecdote from the same source reveals the animosity that seems to have been growing between the Highland novelist and the newly emerging pretender to his throne. In 1932, Mac Colla was the chairman of the National Party of Scotland for the Montrose local branch when, on 25 June, just weeks after the publication of *The Albannach*, they were defeated in a local by-election. 'That Saturday was disastrous for me in other ways', Mac Colla recalls: 'It was the day on which I unwittingly earned the enmity of a great many people whom hitherto I should have called my friends, whom I think I could with justice have called my friends.'[73]After being snubbed by his political comrades upon his return to the campaign headquarters, located at the Star Hotel in Montrose, in confusion, he was quickly escorted to the door by Neil Gunn:

> Only Neil M Gunn accompanied me to the outside door, and I could see he also was labouring under some deep sense of umbrage the cause of which was a puzzle to me. He said or muttered something about C.M. Grieve's article in 'The Free Man', had I seen it? I had in fact been too busy with election work to have time to read the papers, but was interested. What did he say? I asked. 'Oh' said Gunn, unable to disguise his rancour, 'apparently getting your book published was the best thing he has done for the nationalist movement, and so forth'. I asked Gunn if he had a copy. 'Yes', he said.
> 'Can I see it' I asked.
> 'No', said Gunn, shut the door in my face and (forthwith) locked it. [74]

The article in question is examined in detail in the following chapter.

The cause of their disputes may have been literary but, retrospectively at least, Mac Colla's displeasure at what he perceived as Gunn's attitude towards him verges on the personal, as he recalls again: 'He [Gunn] took me on a long walk that Sunday (26 June) afternoon through the hills of my native town during which he carefully and with condescension expanded to me the art of writing a novel. I held my piece, for I

[72] NLS. Dep 265/33.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

could'.[75] Determining exactly to what extent Mac Colla held any serious personal enmity for Gunn, despite professional suspicions he may have had regarding the Clearances novel (Gunn's *Butcher's Broom* appeared in 1934) is difficult with such limited material. In keeping with the statement made at the beginning of this chapter though, curious or prying interest aside, it does not necessarily contribute to the focus of this thesis to speculate on personal relationships – it is their writing which both connects and divides Gunn and Mac Colla. In this context, their personal relationship is only afforded attention because it crucially demonstrates the development of the idea of the 'Highland writer' in Scottish literature of this period. Mac Colla directly criticises Gunn for the lack of a genuinely Gaelic interpretation of the Gaidhealtachd. Towards the end of his life, he was outspoken and critical of what he saw as Gunn's unwarranted title as 'the novelist of the Highlands' and he also demonstrates here, rather poignantly, his awareness of a converse lack of any great commercial success on his own part:

> Unfortunately he [Gunn] had not in my opinion the requisite initial qualities. He was in the first place far too 'nice'. If he was the novelist of the Highlands why did the heather not fire, or even begin to smoke in his vicinity? Of course, of the requisite non-literary qualities he lacked the first and essential; he did not speak or understand Gaelic, and so far as I know made no serious attempt to remedy this deficiency. Unfortunately for him, language is a people's 'window upon life', and inability to look through that window means the inability to see life in their subtle individual way. Whatever he was, he was not the novelist of the Highlands: it had to be left to non-Gaels, especially Germans and Japanese, to recognise him as such. At the same moment I had before me forty years of severe handicap, physical, social, domestic, economic – I would NOT leave Scotland – forty years of the absence of even the minimal conditions requisite for any sort of writing. With the inevitable consequence my future came to reside more and more in my past.[76]

This reaffirms then the focus of this chapter; namely, that Gaelic is the substance of his identity as a writer – he goes so far as to criticise Neil Gunn here because Gunn

[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

cannot fully present the truth of the experience which his writing can only ever suggest or hint at, because Gunn himself cannot understand the language which his characters only fictitiously use to interpret their world – to genuinely be 'the novelist of the Highlands', if such a thing is at all possible, is to be the novelist of the Gaels. The interpretation and understanding of their language is an individual and defining factor in Mac Colla's writing, and this is something that Gunn cannot match – it is the window through which everything; religion, independence, nation, society, politics – life itself – is perceived. Without it, Gunn is writing about the Highlands in English and from an English perspective. Essentially, what Mac Colla is alluding to, is that Gunn cannot truthfully experience the Gaidhealtachd, because he has never understood its language.

It is the issue of language then, which is most crucial when taking into account Mac Colla's attitudes to Gunn and his writing. In his essay, 'Literary Lights', Lewis Grassic Gibbon questions the contemporary Scottish literary scene of the 1920s and early1930s and, appearing to agree with Mac Colla to some extent here, argues that it is through the use of language that Scottish literature must be understood, and that only through this use of language can the nation be afforded any individual status outside of a region of England. Of Neil Gunn, for example, he states that: 'Had his language been in Gaelic or Scots there is no doubt of the space or place he would have occupied …writing in orthodox English, he is merely a brilliantly unorthodox Englishman.'[77] For the future of the Gaelic language, written or otherwise, his tone is not optimistic, but Fionn Mac Colla is directly referenced:

> The present attempts to revive this culture are necessarily doomed to failure. In its hey-day, Gaelic culture was surprisingly beautiful and vital. As part of Scotland's cultural heritage it will survive for its richness and beauty. But a

[77] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Hairst: Essays & Short Stories* ed. by Ian S. Munro (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1967), p.149.

> people can no more live on the glories of the past than it can survive on the memories of its last meal. The death rattle of Gaelic culture may be amplified by all sorts of bodies and committees. They delude themselves, however, in thinking that by so doing they are performing an act or resurrection…Fionn MacColla, in English, it may be noted, is far away the finest example of the Gaelic influence. In a very profound sense, his English is the finest Gaelic we have.[78]

Mac Colla's decision to write in English has a consequence and a paradox: he is able to reach a wider audience, but he is unable, according to Gibbon at any rate, to write a truly Scottish Gaelic novel in this way. This though, as has been argued in the previous section, was never his intention. He does not necessarily claim to be 'the novelist of the Highlands' himself, but he does insinuate that he is better placed to write about the Gaidhealtachd through the basic fact that he is a Gaelic-speaking novelist, and Gunn is not. Mac Colla's use of Gaelic as a symbol though, as will be discussed throughout this thesis, is as much to do with his political agenda as it is to do with any literary representation of Scotland. His particular use of language deliberately widens the gulf between English and Gaelic – between England and Scotland. Although he writes in English, he is clear to inflect it with distinguishing Gaelic idioms and Gaelic sentences and structures.

To heighten this paradox then: according to Gibbon's theory, Mac Colla's writing is not Gaelic – but it is not English either: 'the prose – or verse – is impeccably correct, the vocabulary is rich and adequate, the English is severe, serene … but unfortunately it is not English. The English reader is haunted by a sense of something foreign stumbling and hesitating behind the smooth façade of adequate technique: it is as though the writer did not *write* himself, but *translated* himself.' [79] It is open to debate as to whether this should be interpreted as criticism. Mac Colla

[78] Ibid., pp. 155-6.
[79] Ibid., p. 144.

makes no attempt to hide behind a 'façade of adequate technique' and would no doubt champion the suggestion that his writing was not English. His statement, from the very title of his first novel, is clear: *The Albannach* combines English and Gaelic. It is not only a political and a cultural statement, but it is reflective of contemporary society. He writes in English because he must – it is the language best suited to his purpose, but it is also the language of the Gaels. They are today entirely, and were mostly in Mac Colla's time, a bilingual people. For Mac Colla, English was 'Proper', but Gaelic was the 'real one' through which an 'authentic' Gaelic experience could be glimpsed.

There is no intent here to accuse Gunn of being unsympathetic to Gaelic or of being singularly unaware of the relationship between language and nation. Neither is there any intent to simplify the complex issues and relationships of the period into polarised camps of opposition. The brief examples and accounts examined above serve simply to place Mac Colla within the literary contexts of the period in the hope that his work can be better understood. It is necessary to reference Gunn and MacDiarmid because, quite simply, unintentionally or otherwise and aside from Mac Colla's own statement that there was no intellectual influence from MacDiarmid on his work, these two writers have had an enormous influence on both the reaction to, and legacy of, Mac Colla's writing. The attitudes of the writers who were involved in Mac Colla's career are as idiosyncratic as their work, and by no means is this section constructed to suggest that they were opposed on all counts. It would be extremely misleading to leave Gunn without a defence in this context, and though there is no room to accommodate a full study of his work or his place, an account of his opinions on language and nation are a fitting conclusion to this section.

Although Gunn's comments here are in reference to Scots rather than Gaelic, they exemplify the interconnectedness of Scottish culture and politics in the 1920s and 30s:

> … The Scots Vernacular is an affair exclusively Scottish, and to keep it alive, Scotland must be kept alive. For if Scotland dies, then not only the Vernacular but everything that gives her separate meaning and identity dies with her … the logic of this is to me unavoidable. Whenever the conception of the nation is reborn, immediately everything that distinguishes that nation is reborn, including in particular its forms of expression. Take such diverse countries as Norway, Czechoslovakia, and the Irish Free State. In each case when nationhood was resumed, the native language or languages, long fallen into desuetude, became the active concern of the whole people. That is the fact, whether we like to honour it or not.[80]

The unpublished notes, from which the anecdotes on Gunn are taken, also refer to Mac Colla's friendship and collaboration with the Montrose painter, Edward Baird (1904-1949) whose portrait of Mac Colla; *Portrait of a Young Scotsman* is included as a frontispiece in this thesis after being lost for nearly eighty years.[81] Referring to the Saturday of the Montrose by-election in June 1932, Mac Colla was on a boat with Baird, immediately before receiving news of the defeat:

> By his early death Scotland yet again lost prematurely an exceptionally gifted son. He was then at the beginning of (what should have been) a brilliant career. His first portrait, of myself, was at that minute hanging in the Royal Academy and no doubt the realisation came from time to time during that placid evening and uplifted him, as it certainly did me. As a matter of fact the motion of the boat accorded well with my own soaring or sailing sensations – of new authorship. My first book, *The Albannach*, had been recently published. The fact uplifted me more than the public reception of it, for I had in fact been savagely mauled by certain of the entries. To one I was 'a Gael who trounces his own', to another I had written 'an intolerably bad book', while J. McNair Reid of the *Glasgow Evening Times* headed a full half page of savagery with the title 'Pig's Eyes in Alba'.

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[80] Neil M. Gunn, 'Preserving the Scottish Tongue: A Legacy and How to Use It', in *The Man Who Came Back: Essays and Short Stories*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991: rep. 1998), 77-78, (pp.77-8).

[81] Mac Colla notes in 'Mein Bumpf' that the portrait was bought, 'by J.H. Whyte and after being loaned for a time to the Nationalist Club which used to be in Coates Crescent, taken away with him on his return to America, where it still is.' (Mac Colla, 1973, p.24). Ultimately, Mac Colla appears to have been mistaken on the whereabouts of this portrait. No photographs of this portrait existed until it was rediscovered in England in 2010.

> …we were young, and eager to demonstrate that where the Scottish national movement was concerned, politics was the art of the impossible.[82]

Portrait of a Young Scotsman individualises the heroic figure. Its proto fascist iconography, with Mac Colla dressed in a green military uniform, references Irish republicanism and Celtic mythology. The Lion Rampant on Mac Colla's breast is a clear statement of resistance. Although that might be one reading, Baird's painting, when contextualised with *The Albannach*, also emphasises the fact that Mac Colla's fiction removes the 'individual' at the centre of fascist notions and turns them around. Mac Colla's fiction is entirely opposed to tyrannical rule and is constructed to stand against it. He was not a communist, but he envisaged a Scotland for the people, and the portrait also references the individualised figures of the socialist movements in Scotland and around the world during the first decades of the twentieth century. Before the portrait was rediscovered in 2010, Blackwood wrote in *Portrait of a Young Scotsman* (2004), that it was 'the fruit of a close creative partnership between the two men'. [83] Its rediscovery opens the possibility for a full examination of the collaboration between Baird and Mac Colla for the first time in eighty years.

[82] NLS Dep. 265/33
[83] Blackwood, 2004, p.34

An Elegy and a New Hope: Music and Nationalism

nuair a bha mi òg
cha b'eachdraidh ach cuimhne – Aonghas MacNeacail[84]

Mac Colla's contribution to literature is to explore what it is to be a Gael in the modern age of the post-Clearance, post WWI, cultural decline. This Gaelic experience sets the context for the firm establishment of a Gaelic identity or nationality in Scotland which is employed by Mac Colla to freshly examine contemporary Scottish politics – it is this expression and knowledge which Mac Colla argues must shape the contemporary and future evolution of Scotland.

Through an examination of his early publications, letters, and essays, as well as his autobiographical material, almost all of which demonstrate his focus on the relationship between culture and politics, it is possible to chart his growing public profile from the late 1920s onwards and his associations with other important literary and cultural figures of the period. To examine this important material in context is to trace the origins and development of his distinct – in some ways revolutionary – approach to the political position of Gaelic in Scotland, and allows insight into the influences which directed him to become not only a novelist, but a socio-cultural and political writer; as Duncan Glen describes him, a 'Literary Nationalist.'[85]

In one of the earliest examples of his autobiographical material, Mac Colla mentions that his father is of 'Black Isle stock.'[86] Mac Colla's father was a native Gaelic-speaker and for a time at least, he did not belong to the Plymouth Brethren. This is important – as we have seen, it immediately connects Mac Colla's paternal

[84] Translation: 'when I was young /it wasn't history but memory'
Aonghas MacNeacail, 'Oideachadha Ceart' in *A Proper Schooling and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), pp. 12-14.
[85] Duncan Glen, 'Literary Nationalists' in *Z2O Magazine*, 22 (2007), pp. 22-30.
[86] Mac Colla in *Modern Scottish Literature: A Popular Guide-Book Catalogue*, ed. by R. D. MacLeod (Glasgow, 1933), pp. 65-66

family to what he considered to be a more natural Scottish cultural experience; that is, a Gaelic cultural experience: '…While my mother was born into the Plymouth Brethren, my father was a convert in his twenties, so that he had years of "sinful", that is natural life behind him, and certain habits were already formed, which he could not so easily discard.'[87] It is these 'certain habits' and their influence on Mac Colla's attitude to the extent that they shaped both his writing and his politics which are the focus of this section.

In *Too Long In This Condition*, Mac Colla writes that his father was 'well known especially as a traditional fiddler' and that as a young man he and his friends would walk the country-side of Inverness, 'playing fiddles, mouth-organs or melodeons and singing together – some were very good singers of Gaelic songs.'[88] As a child, he seems to have absorbed a great deal from Donald McDonald's '… sidesplitting stories about those parts – the heart of the Highlands – and the tricks and jokes with which the people passed the winter especially.'[89] It is through his father then, that this Gaelic window exposed Mac Colla to a different perception of the cultural realities of Scotland than did early twentieth-century Montrose; it was both inspiring and frustrating. He laments: '… my youth was lightened with the jokes and witticisms indulged in by a no longer existent people.'[90] It was through his father that Mac Colla was passed lingering remnants of any natural Gaelic experience in Scotland: 'The heart of the Highlands … where my father spent his early years, before he settled in Montrose and was married, was at that time, a place of music, stories, and above all, Gaelic.'[91]

[87]Mac Colla, 1975, p. 63. Mac Colla notes that 'the late Ruairidh Macleod, the doyen of Gaelic singers and the first to make recordings, was one of the company'.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p. 63.

His descriptions in *Too Long in This Condition* of the Inverness-shire of the late nineteenth century are drawn from a chapter in which he describes the great influence that music had in his life – that he devotes an entire chapter to this influence in a book which is otherwise entirely concerned with nationalist politics and Gaelic, demonstrates how Mac Colla connected these cultural and political issues. By his account, his father was a gifted musician, and the great influence that this exposure to traditional music had on developing an understanding of a unique cultural heritage is demonstrated in his work. Through the central role of traditional music and oral culture especially in *The Albannach*, he seeks to firmly establish a Gaelic voice of representation with which to further define Gaelic as an intrinsically positive and harmonious presence in Scotland and Scottish literature. In both his fiction and non-fiction, it is argued that Gaelic has, at its core, a musical essence and expression – the language itself offers a *blas* (taste and flavour) of a uniquely Scottish and Gaelic experience; its cultural relationship to music enhances this. Music is a living expression borne from the cultural experience; it is a unifying expression which is more immediately accessible than language. Traditional Gaelic music is a major factor in Mac Colla's identification with Gaelic and Scotland, then. It also helped to develop, as shall be determined here, his commitment to Scottish nationalism.

His earliest experiences with traditional Scottish music, he relates with reference to his father: 'I recall that sometimes he put the fiddle under his chin, sometimes against his breast. Whenever I saw him take down the fiddle I almost ceased to breathe lest my small-boy presence should be noted and I'd be sent to bed.'[92] The initial exposure to this expression of Scottish culture came directly through the fiddle music played by his Gaelic-speaking, Highland father. There was

[92] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 64.

also though, for a brief period, the blind music teacher who rented out the shop and studio below the family's home. He notes that the name of the 'organist and teacher of music' was Farquhar[93] (later the name of the bard in *And the Cock Crew*) and that at around the age of ten, Mac Colla would: '… lend him my arm all over town, ostensibly to tune pianos, but actually to play them thereafter. No one guessed the effect of that on my spirit.'[94] Serving to further establish here the marriage which formed in his mind between music and Gaelic, Mac Colla also refers to W. Jackson Farquhar when discussing the prevalence of Gaelic outside of 'traditionally' Gaelic areas in *Too Long in This Condition*:

> My friend the late W.J. Farquhar (of Kirremuir) told me several times when I was a schoolboy that his mother, Jean Ogilby or Ogilvy, either spoke Gaelic herself, with some degree of fluency, or was familiar with the language in childhood…she would have been born about the middle of the last century in Glen Arm in Glen Prosen, which is itself a branch of Glen Clova.[95]

While the music was being absorbed, the nationalist influence was being developed, through the very same sources, with an increased recognition of Scotland as a nation with a suppressed linguistic identity. The importance of music is discussed, of course, with regard to influences from outside of Scotland too – as with his attitude to history, politics, culture and nationalism, which will be discussed in further chapters, Europe is a continuously important focus for Mac Colla's work and radicalism. There is no focus, however, which is as crucial to the understanding of his character as this greatest influence on his life:

> Without those two strains of music, the Scottish national and European at large, I could never have developed into what I became and am. Music had a transmuting effect on my being as of something I perceived and 'knew' from

[93] W. Jackson Farquhar was born in or near Kirremuir in 1897. He is listed in the *Scottish Directory (1919 – 1920)* as a Music Seller, based at 106 Murray Street. Mac Colla's father is listed as a shoemaker in the same edition, based at 122 Murray Street.
[94] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 57.
[95] Ibid.

> the region of 'the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty'. In effect, *music made me*.[96]

Traditional music and Gaelic intertwine here as the most individual and expressively identifiable examples of a unique Scottish culture. These particular interests, however, are at odds with what Mac Colla considers to be the more restrictive influences in Scotland, influences which had a negative impact and which also develop as serious themes in his literature. Herdman notes, for example, that Mac Colla was firmly of the opinion that strictly observed religious doctrines like those of the Plymouth Brethren to which he had belonged as a child, had 'suppressed the Gaelic musical spirit.'[97] Mac Colla had experience, not only of a distinctly Scottish language and culture directly through his own heritage, but, conversely, of the suppressive elements in Scotland's society (religiously doctrinal in this particular context, but political also as will be examined shortly) which have diminished and harmed any unique statement of distinctive Scottish nationality.

Music nurtured a positive sense of national sentiment and combined it with a discernable cultural inheritance. Purely as it represents a negative impact for Fionn Mac Colla, the suppression of the 'Gaelic musical spirit' by Calvinistic doctrines in Scotland can also now be connected to the relationship between Scotland's social problems and her political position in the early twentieth century.

'And then there was Dundee', Mac Colla writes in 'Mein Bumpf.' 'There were a number of the Lord's People in it, i.e. persons belonging to our own particular sect of the Brethren, and a good deal of coming and going.'[98] The family's religion brought them to Dundee often – as a young child then, yet another Scotland:

> Things were grim in my youngest days…our route from the station must have taken us through some of the worst slums in the world. I looked at them and

[96] Ibid,, p. 65.
[97] From a personal conversation with John Herdman, Pitlochry, September, 2007.
[98] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p.12.

> their dwarfish and deformed denizens in disbelieving horror, telling myself that this was Scotland and these my fellow-countrymen…no means existed to stop this inhuman scandal any more than to stop the genocidal emigrations.[99]

Positive cultural influences and a sense of nationality developed alongside a realisation of the social deprivation, poverty and declining cultural identity in much of Scotland at this time. Fuelled by a Christian empathy and the 'Folk should be kind to folk!' mentality of the North East (both, incidentally, influences which originated on the side of his maternal family), the conditions of his 'fellow-countrymen' became a clear indication as to the condition of his country:

> …Intelligence sought about everywhere for the necessary fulcrum that must be somewhere to turn the situation over, only to find nothing would serve…By the time I had reached my teens I was in no doubt as to what was lacking to cure the situation in all its aspects, and from that day till the present moment I have never drawn a single breath that was not an aspiration towards Scottish self-government.[100]

Social concern; anger; political responsibility; cultural regeneration; self-government – such sentiments do not mark Mac Colla as unique among Scottish writers of the 1920s and 30s. The attitudes which he exemplifies in his writing are, by his own account, attitudes which developed in him from such childhood experiences as have been detailed here. His politics, as with music, would, as will be demonstrated in chapter three through his writing for *The Free Man*, take much inspiration from European examples. His involvement in cultural and political matters in Scotland, likewise places him well within any sort of agenda for the Scottish literary movement of the time which was actively engaged in the most important societal matters:

> Its writers were equally involved in the debates about social, economic and political conditions in Scotland and Europe as they were in the debates about Scotland's literary culture. For these writers, cultural renewal had to proceed

[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

> hand in hand with a wider national renewal; and nationalism … and internationalism were two sides of the same coin, not opposing positions.[101]

The two most important characters in Mac Colla's work are Murdo Anderson in *The Albannach* and Fearchar the poet in *And the Cock Crew*. Both are Gaelic bards. Music, then, is discussed in this chapter because it developed a 'Scottish sentiment' (a phrase borrowed from Burns) which inspired Fionn Mac Colla's nationalism:

> That was how I came to have so large a familiarity with traditional Scottish music – and such high critical standards thereanent. And I am convinced that that was largely how it happened to me – as it happened to Robert Burns in somewhat different fashion – that 'such a torrent of Scottish sentiment was poured into my veins as has boiled along there ever since'.[102]

Mac Colla recalls hearing Gaelic for the first time from his father at around age ten and this is described in *Too Long in This Condition* as '…one of the two or three most momentous [occasions] of my life'[103] in that it precipitated a search of both the self and the nation:

> The point of scientific interest lay in my realisation that I had known since skale-days at any rate that the situation was such that there must be another language spoken 'in some parts of Scotland', and that that language had to be *the real thing, the real one*. I did not know its name, if it had one: but I knew that I had just heard it. Reasoning over the matter in later years I believed I saw how the content of the whole experience had seemed inevitable and that I had known it before (without knowing that I knew it as it were). The proper language (known at some time or other as English) was completely foreign to my soul and sensibility, having a cramping effect, an effect of making shallow and artificial. I loved by contrast our language (nowadays known as Scots or Lallans) in which I felt my soul and sensibility free to move about and express themselves – *almost* to the full. Therin lay the crux. I had been conscious of the Proper language *as more totally foreign to me than the mere speaking of Scots as my first and loved language would have explained*. [104]

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[101] Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939* (University of Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.12.
[102] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 64.
[103] Ibid., p. 55
[104] Ibid.

From a study of his work in the context of his life, it is clear that the Gaelic language and the independence that it represents are at the core of Mac Colla's entire purpose as a writer. His conclusions that English, or 'the Proper' language is foreign, and 'alien to his soul' defines his position with regard to Scotland as a nation of psychological confusion, at odds with itself, and that this condition affects its very existence as a nation.

By 1935, Mac Colla had published his first book, and begun his second.[105] He was considered to be enough of an authority on Gaelic nationality and its place in Scottish history and society by the literary movement of the time that MacDiarmid proposed he write a 'book on the Gaelic position', in a letter expressing his belief in Mac Colla's 'exceptional ability to deal with the matter comprehensively and constructively', though Mac Colla later declined the offer, due to other commitments.[106] The previous year, he had developed enough profile to be included in the International Congress of P.E.N., the world association of writers, in whose journal for that year he is listed as among the 28 Gaelic members along with celebrated company of the time, including Professor W.J. Watson, Rev. Kenneth Macleod, John Bannerman, J.L. Campbell and Hon. Ruairidh Erskine of Marr. [107] Another Gaelic member was Father John MacMillan of Barra, whom Mac Colla had met on Barra in 1930. Father MacMillan[108] or Maighstir Iain Mac 'ille a' Mhaoil, was, in Mac Colla's own words, 'a remarkable man, the only priest I had met and the

[105] *The Albannach* was published in the spring of 1932.
[106] MacDiarmid, in Bold, 1984, p. 566.
[107] *P.E.N. XIIth International Congress Scotland*, June (1934), pp. 98-9.
[108] Compton Mackenzie, *My Life and Times*, 6 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 118. Compton Mackenzie notes in volume six of his autobiography, *My Life and Times*, that 'Maighstir Iain was a Gaelic bard of the olden time from the Catholic island of Barra, and his great desire was to return there as a parish priest [which he later did]. Soon after the [first] war he had gone to Canada with a number of emigrants from the Catholic Highlands and Islands. There he had a great fight with the Canadian authorities, who he felt had not kept their side of the bargain and were inflicting unnecessary hardship upon the immigrants. In the end, though not going as far as Henry II, they managed to get rid of a "turbulent" priest'.

prototype of Father O'Reilly in *The Albannach*'.[109] Father John, himself a bard of great note, was also a friend of Compton Mackenzie and the inspiration for Mackenzie's Father James Macalister in *Whisky Galore*,[110] but Mac Colla's descriptions of his relationship with this man further establish the way that he, and others in the Western Isles, viewed Gaelic as a political tool with which to draw attention to the nationalist movement in Scotland, and discredit the Labour Party '…and all its pretensions of concern for Scotland, a vote-catching gimmick for the Labour Party, but never…intended to go any farther,'[111] through direct action '…in order that our public trial and condemnation in the courts might draw attention to what was going on.'[112] Mac Colla's initial plan to draw attention to the movement was a land-raid on the island of Rum; such a plan was loaded with political and historical Gaelic-centred radicalism, more of which will be discussed in chapter two, but the plan was leaked and failed. Nevertheless, his political plans, as with his writing, were combining politics, history and language in the cause of nationalism:

> I expected … that the papers would have recognised the material of good copy in writing up the history of the Island of Rum and this present condition. Rum was a blatant case in both particulars, and in this way the general reading public, in Scotland and it was hoped further afield, would discover for the first time the realities of Scottish history…one way or another it would have meant the end of the Sporting Estate system in the Highlands. It would have meant the repopulation of the Highlands – with a Gaelic population; the salvation of the language. *In effect, the Clearances in reverse.*[113]

Mac Colla's motivation was for his actions to have effect. Although his plans at direct action were proving fruitless, it is the same motivation – to draw attention, to change the situation of both Gaelic and Scotland – that lay behind his actions from protest to writing. He was indeed a 'Literary Nationalist'. During his engagement

[109] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 88.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., p. 84.
[113] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 91-2.

with plans to revive the land raids of the islands, he was also beginning *The Albannach*, a book which was also constructed to provoke debate, if not enact change.[114] His disappointment in what he considered to be the apathy of his fellow Scots to the language he felt was their national inheritance was manifest in his belief that the English language was 'completely foreign … to soul and sensibility.' *The Albannach,* he writes in 'Mein Bumpf' '…was intended to break through this barrier of ignorance and bring the existence of the living, surviving language to the notice of a benighted public … Gaelic ought to concern everybody in Scotland.'[115]

His dedication to preserving and promoting Gaelic and Scotland were developed at an early age, and the purpose of this chapter has been to establish this deeply personal relationship and his recognition as to his profession and purpose. Everything which followed, from his writing to his politics, stems from this 'Gaelic experience' and his very early commitment to it. As he writes from Palestine, before he had returned to Scotland to devote himself to the nationalist movement, in a letter to the official Comunn Gaidhealach magazine, *An Gaidheal* in 1928: '… as a young boy I longed with an indescribable longing to learn the Gaelic tongue, and, in the absence of any opportunity whatever for so doing, I set myself, with the assistance of MacBean's grammar and phrase-book, to learn it in the spare time left me from the study of four other languages and two sciences.'[116] Gaelic is at the core of both his motivation and his work. Through his own ideas on the importance of knowing or experiencing history, he turned to Gaelic, with what J.B. Caird describes as 'a shock

[114] Mac Colla notes that he began writing *The Albannach* in August or September 1929 at Hugh MacDiarmid's house at 18 Pyrland Road in North London. (Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p. 13).
[115] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1975, p. 14.
[116] Tom Macdonald (Fionn Mac Colla), *An Gaidheal*, 23.12, September 1928, 187-188, (p.187).

of delighted recognition as if the process was one of recollection rather than learning.'[117]

[117] Caird, 1975, p. 8.

Chapter 2: *The Albannach*

Neil Gunn was an established writer of Highland themes by the time Mac Colla's *The Albannach* was published in 1932. Gunn's first and second novels *The Grey Coast* (1923) and *The Lost Glen* (1932) are novels on the Highland condition which must be acknowledged here in order to place Mac Colla's emergence in a comparative context.

Like Mac Colla, Gunn was investigating Highland decline and explored the value of traditions and society. While Mac Colla has been criticised for presenting a novel of 'Gaelic horrors',[1] Gunn was similarly concerned with a 'Gaelic' tradition which was established by the time *The Albannach* appeared; the aim was to draw attention to the gloom, decay and bleakness of post-war decline in the Highlands.[2] While Mac Colla would reject ideas of the 'Celtic Twilight' and romanticised images of the Highlands, Gunn too took issue with the 'false imagery' that he saw in writers of fashionable 'misty' Celticism of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, such as William Sharp (who wrote as Fiona Macleod). Gunn's novels of this period are pessimistic. *The Grey Coast* investigated such notions and presented a reality of the Highlands which was despondent about the position of Gaelic. Mac Colla makes much of the fact that Gunn did not speak the language, suggesting that this detracts from a comprehensive presentation of the Highlands, as will be examined.

Gunn's presentation of poverty, emigration and starvation are not romanticized portrayals of the North-East Highlands and although Mac Colla too rejected romanticism in his work, there is arguably more optimism in his politicisation of the Gaelic language and culture. Mac Colla would present an idea of regeneration,

[1] See 'Pig's Eyes in Alba' by John MacNair Reid, in *Evening Times*, 16 June, 1932.

[2] Margery Palmer McCulloch has examined the portrayal of the bleak Highlands in Gunn's work in Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil Gunn: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987).

on a personal and cultural level, but Gunn's work on this, *The Grey Coast* for example, is bleak.

The Grey Coast appeared before *The Albannach* was published, though *The Lost Glen*, also written before *The Albannach*, was also published in 1932 and has as its central motif the return of the 'lad o' pairts' to the Highlands. By this period in Highland literature such a theme was familiar. The return of the prodigal son to the Highlands, to find himself at odds with his community is central to both novels and fundamental to what was clearly an examination not only of the Highlands but also of the Scottish, even European, condition in the aftermath of the First World War.

Fionn Mac Colla's writing is criticised for a focus on Calvinist doctrine and the 'nay-saying' culture, which he believed it had fostered in Scotland. This is an issue for nearly all of his published books and essays, though while it can be said that his work represents his personal politics in fictional form, this chapter argues that his first novel, *The Albannach*, emphasised a radical solution to the cultural and political situation of Scotland and the Gaidhealtachd, and that this has been side-lined as a result of misrepresentation in early criticism, which has not since been satisfactorily rectified. To establish this, it is necessary to explore Mac Colla's attitude to the Reformation, more precisely the attitudes and politics that grew from it, in order to establish that an attack on this 'progression' was not the message of *The Albannach*. While discussing *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967) in his memoirs of his time as a frequenter of Edinburgh's famed literary pub scene, *Poets, Pubs, Polls & Pillar Boxes* (1999) John Herdman analyses the effect that the important issue of the Reformation would have on Mac Colla's later work:

> In this book the author of the brilliant early novels *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*, which had caused Hugh MacDiarmid to hail him in the 1930s as the white hope of the Scottish literary renaissance in the field of fiction, endeavoured yet again to put across his urgent conviction that the Reformation constituted the root cause of everything that had since gone wrong with Scotland, from the loss of independent sovereignty to the decline of the Gaelic language.[3]

Herdman's general statement on Mac Colla's pre-occupation with the Reformation and of his standing in Scottish literary society provides a number of essential co-ordinate points for those unfamiliar with Fionn Mac Colla, not least emphasising the direction which his writing would eventually take, a shift from the early affirmations which are explored in *The Albannach*, the early development of which will be charted throughout this thesis.

Mac Colla's concern with the Scottish Reformation influences elements of all his work, but it is necessary here to focus on the issues which he saw as having been shaped by the Reformation, as well as the subsequent effects on Scottish society. His central focus, is however, unmistakably, a positive reclamation of Gaelic identity. This chapter will explore this, juxtaposed with an examination of the critical reception which incorrectly emphasised a preoccupation with, and attack on, the Kirk.

Herdman's reminiscences also bring an interesting point to the fore regarding Mac Colla's work and how it was received at the time. Hugh MacDiarmid commented, for example, that Mac Colla's novels *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* moved 'on a higher intellectual plane than ninety per cent of our fiction', while a sizeable amount of criticism was wholly negative.[4] This can serve as a starting point when attempting to shed light on the career of a man who many agree has been 'undeservedly neglected' by the reading public for various reasons, attributed by some

[3] Herdman, John, *Poets, Pubs, Polls & Pillar Boxes: Memoirs of an era in Scottish Politics & Letters* (Kirkcaldy: Akros publications, 1999), p. 20.
[4] Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Company I've Kept*, (London: Hutchison, 1966), p.21.

to the perceived tastes of the reading public in Scotland at the time.[5] Alan Bold, for example, urged that Mac Colla's '…continual assault on the Kirk did not endear him to the majority of Scottish readers…' His fierce and confrontational style can be added to the argument that he '…was always kept on the sidelines by a consensus of critical indifference',[6] and there is, of course, another major writer of the Highlands to contend with in Neil Gunn. Although, as Bold commented: 'MacDiarmid praised Mac Colla and offended Neil Gunn by championing the author of *The Albannach* (1932) as the authentic novel [sic] of the Highlands…'[7], Mac Colla was never to achieve the same amount of critical success that Gunn experienced, and his relationship with, and opinion of, Gunn is examined in this chapter in order to place it within the literary context of the period, which is central to Mac Colla's position as a 'Highland' writer. While Mac Colla was indeed fiercely opinionated, this thesis contends that his early work, and most especially *The Albannach*, deserves to be examined within a variety of contexts from the period and beyond in order to reassert its original, affirming message with regard to language, nation and identity.

Mac Colla is an opinionated writer. Isobel Murray states that 'his opinions are openly urged in his autobiography *Too Long in This Condition* (1975) and his extraordinary book of polemic *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967), and they are made clear in his fiction also'.[8] His own personal opinions and experiences which have been established in the previous chapter, motivated him to write books with a subject matter focused on and around Gaelic culture, re-evaluating what he perceived

[5] See James B. Caird, 'Fionn MacColla – the Twofold Heritage', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, pp.31-37.
[6] Alan Bold, 'Fionn MacColla and Celtic Culture', *Modern Scottish Literature* (London: Longman, 1983), p. 200.
[7] Ibid., p. 200.
[8] Isobel Murray, in 'Novelists of the Renaissance', ed. by Cairns Craig, 4, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 114.

as a forced 'conditioning' in Scottish society. As he writes in *Too Long in this Condition:* 'This, without respect, is how we all learned our "history"; by training like Pavlov's dogs so that whenever desired an unnatural but associated reaction took the place of the natural or rational reaction.'[9] Mac Colla's proclamation of what he perceived to be historical truth, then, underlies much of his literary efforts and it is important that one takes into account that in order to fully examine and appreciate Fionn Mac Colla's work, it is necessary to focus, in this chapter, on the social and historical contexts in which it was written and published.

The Scottish Gaidhealtachd has a rich cultural tradition of poetry and song, and the importance of this setting in exploring a Gaelic experience is central to the study of his first novel. In *The Albannach*, the young protagonist, Murdo Anderson, crofter's son and brilliant student, leaves behind his stifling Highland community to study at Glasgow University. Despite initial success, he is forced to return home through a series of unfortunate events, first the death of his father and then to care for his mother after she suffers a stroke. Fully intending to return to Glasgow, he must abandon his studies for good after his mother dies and he takes on the responsibilities of running the family croft and shop. He becomes involved with the local minister's daughter and, after she becomes pregnant, they are married. Trapped in a loveless marriage and stranded in the community, Murdo takes to the drink, which causes the death of his child, and he finds himself ostracised. His alcoholism takes full control of his despair and he resolves to commit suicide but is saved both spiritually and socially, through the embracing of his Gaelic heritage. As Tom Scott notes in *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*: 'His redemption…by reasserting the Gaelic cultural tradition

[9] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 26

through piping and singing, brings redemption also to the small community. The individual talent finds its salvation in the salvation of his community, in re-identification with it, in revitalising it.'[10] This redemption through the traditional arts strikes at the heart of Mac Colla's own beliefs and is clearly reflected in the development of Murdo Anderson. Indeed, Mac Colla has proclaimed Murdo to be '…the protagonist of my own attitude…'[11] and that 'Murdo Anderson has a soul open to poetry, music, the visual beauty of the world, in a word, to Life, and reacts violently against the stifling prohibitions and negations which he finds ruling his native community…'[12]

At this stage, it is necessary to explore the central importance of the poetry and music that Mac Colla employs as the catalyst through which a Gaelic identity is seen as the redeeming factor for the central character and his community, demonstrating also how Mac Colla drew from his own expereinces. Examining Gaelic song and poetry in general is not the main focus here, rather, it is the stated aim to highlight the use of music and poetry as they pertain to the construction of a distinct Gaelic identity within the works of Fionn Mac Colla and to examine how he, as a twentieth-century writer, perceived their role within Gaelic society.

The principal role of verse and song in Gaelic society is testament to it having been in the past, a largely oral culture. The Gaelic folklorist Donald A. Macdonald emphasises here just how established the oral tradition was:

> For centuries the classical literature of the learned orders of bards and seanchaidhs (oral historians) – itself very much orally and traditionally

[10] Tom Scott, 'A Note on *The Albannach*', in *Essays on Fionn Mac* Colla, 66-71, (p. 66).
[11] MacColla, 1984, iv.
[12] Ibid.

> orientated – had coexisted with a rich stream of popular lore, each of them constantly informing and enriching each other.[13]

The strength of the oral tradition in Gaelic society led to the orators and composers of such material being highly valued and powerful members of the community. Thomson emphasises this influential role in society when he notes certain Bardic families in Ireland '…becoming very wealthy and powerful…' and that the '…Scottish evidence itself points to conditions of comfort in a material sense and strong influence in a social and political sense.'[14] It is of little surprise that these traditions play a major role in Mac Colla's writing given the strong focus on Gaelic culture; that the Bardic characters in his writing hold the main stage in his first books is also a testament to this. The role of the Bards and their crucial position in the conflict that arises when these traditional roles are dismantled and the community is threatened would be examined in *And the Cock Crew*, but for the moment, we shall focus on the 'life-affirming' nature that Mac Colla affords to Gaelic oral traditions in *The Albannach*.

Fionn Mac Colla began writing *The Albannach* at the age of twenty-three and, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, later stated that 'It was not really, despite appearances, intended as an attack on anybody. It was an extended parable or allegory of Scottish life, of the Scottish situation, and as an indication of the way out.'[15] His need to defend the book's content may have stemmed from certain unflattering reviews at the time of its original publication, none less so than the review published in the *Evening Times* by John MacNair Reid, a friend of Neil Gunn's, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter:

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[13] Donald A. Macdonald, 'Storytelling', in *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, ed. by Derick Thomson (Glasgow: Gairm, 1983; rep. 1994), 280-2 (p.280).
[14] Derick Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London: Gollanzc, 1974), p.12.
[15] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p. 13.

> Thus it is that every character in the book – down to the miserable child – is detestable in the extreme. It is a chamber of Gaelic horrors. If such be a true representation of Western Highland communal life, then the sooner machine-guns are taken there the better.[16]

On the whole however, the book was well received, with Edwin Muir and especially Hugh MacDiarmid amongst its most notable supporters. Mac Colla himself offers some explanation for the critical appreciation of *The Albannach* in the introduction to the second edition: 'It was the first novel to treat life in the Gaidhealtachd in a realistic manner.'[17] The characters and situations that arise in the book are opposed to the more common romanticism one might find in depictions of the Highlands at this time. Mac Colla compares *The Albannach* to the works of contemporary authors of the period, such as Neil Munro, which he says are '…marred by a treatment exempt from circumstance, by the pushing back of the events to former and distant ages…'[18] Mac Colla was keen to pursue a course that would reveal the life of the contemporary Gael with all the realism and difficulties of Highland living in the twentieth-century. Edwin Muir commented that it is 'an autobiographical novel'[19] though, in contrast, Mac Colla himself has stated that his '…experiences [as a teacher] at Laide … produced *The Albannach*, which is not however to be taken as an account or impression of my life there.'[20] There has been some debate, then, as to the precise autobiographical nature of Mac Colla's first book and whether or not the descriptions of communal life are based on actual accounts of his own life in the Highlands. Muir is correct in highlighting autobiographical *aspects* of the book and

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[16] Andrew Monnickendam, 'Through the Glass Bleakly: Fionn MacColla's view of the Gaelic world in *The Albannach'*, in *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*, ed. by J. Schwend, and D.W. Horst, X (Germersheim: Peter Lang, 1992), 303-316 (p.304).
[17] Mac Colla, 1984, i.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Edwin Muir, 'A New Scottish Novelist' review of Fionn Mac Colla's *The Albannach* (Modern Scot Summer 1932), in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch (University of Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p. 86.
[20] Mac Colla, 1975, p.105.

John Broom has stated: 'There is a strong autobiographical element in the novel, for the Albannach of the title, Murdo Anderson, is also the sensitive intelligent son of narrow Free Presbyterian parents…'[21] It should, however, be noted that although Murdo and Mac Colla may share certain similarities of background, Murdo Anderson is a character functioning as much more than just a mouthpiece for Mac Colla's own particular viewpoint and dissatisfactions. Andrew Monnickendam maintains that Mac Colla supplies the reader with ample evidence of his distance from Murdo Anderson, that this is '…the world as Murdo sees it…' and '…we should not, as a matter of course, take Murdo to be MacColla.'[22] Tom Scott appears to corroborate this by highlighting the multi-faceted nature of Murdo Anderson's conception: '*The Albannach* is not only Murdo, this one Gael in his twentieth century setting: he is The Scotsman, you, me, all of us, the people, the nation, the community.'[23] Scott's view will be examined later, but should be kept in mind whilst considering this novel. Is Murdo Mac Colla's vehicle through which he is able to highlight twentieth-century Highland Scotland's social and cultural issues as they pertain not only to the individual or even just to Gaelic Scotland, but also to the Scottish nation as a whole?

From the opening chapter of the novel, the connections between place, poetry and identity are established. 'It was as if Alba was waiting once again for the birth of a man, and all the mighty bens stood listening for the first cry of the babe that was to be a poet.'[24] There is strong emphasis on the dramatic scenery of the Highlands and the link between place and cultural identity throughout the novel, reflecting Mac Colla's own influences. James Hunter has recognised this connection, here referring to its importance with regard to Gaelic poetry:

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[21] J.L. Broom, 'Fionn MacColla, Albannach Mór', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, 53-66 (p.53).
[22] Monnickendam in Schwend / Drescher, 1992, p. 305.
[23] Scott in Morrison, 1973, p.66.
[24] Mac Colla, 1984, p.2.

> *Birlinn Clann Raghnail*,[25] on its being recited by one of the novel's characters, becomes the means by which English-speaking readers are introduced to the link which Mac Colla discerns between the Gaelic language and the natural environment in which that language was developed…[26]

Vivid physical descriptions are present in both *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*. Landscape, in particular, but also the physical descriptions of his characters, relate the tone of Mac Colla's novels and often carry a careful and methodical presentation of frustration. A delicate, deliberate and precise sense of righteous injustice pervades these descriptions. In *The Albannach*, potential is seen through the landscape itself. Murdo's psychological tensions are heightened by his context, at once claustrophobic and releasing:

> It was the beginning of a period when the warm days went past in procession, each one in every way like its fellow. Each morning, the sun came up behind the bens in a cool air of the dawning.[27]

The intensity of such descriptions speaks of an inner psychological state. 'This mist gathered thick in the glens where it surged and billowed like milk before beginning to ooze and clamber up the mountain-sides. When it reached the top the wind up there tore bits of it away and sent them chasing each other across the sky.'[28] The Highland condition, the specifics of Gaelic culture and Mac Colla's vision of Catholicism, are manifested through descriptions like this which reimagine the landscape, but also comment on a conflict between repression and freedom.

Whereas in *The Albannach*, physical descriptions often mix ideas of spiritual freedom against mental confinement within geographical constraints, *And the Cock Crew* is itself a better study for the metaphysical representation of psychological

[25] The great poem by the most famous of the eighteenth-century Gaelic poets, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (c. 1695-c.1770).
[26] James Hunter, *On the Other Side of Sorrow* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1995), p. 71.
[27] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 38.
[28] Ibid.

collapse, related again through the descriptions of the landscape. When the townspeople of Gleann Luachrach are huddled to answer the Factor at the opening of the novel, the spiritual freedoms which coolly rise from the bens of *The Albannach* give way to geographical and psychological isolation:

> To north and south in the thinning dusk the nearer hills were momently approaching their height and form; but a dense and obscure greyness still enveloped the more distant. Below, the breadth of the Machair could already be seen dimly, the plain coastal region with fields and trees and farm-houses. And beyond – heavy and flat and leaden dull, its farthest edges stretching away under the east, and in places with a leaden sheen – the Eastern Sea.[29]

The land itself is drawing in upon the people of *And the Cock Crew*, through a forced perspective in which there is a total absence of colour. The environment is at once unfamiliar and unpopulated. The enormous dull grey 'Eastern Sea' looms, where the tidemark of the Clearances would finally reach. The power of Mac Colla's creative prose encapsulates an essential quality of the Highland landscape: the power it has over the inner psychological states of its inhabitants. In *And the Cock Crew*, physical descriptions, as when experienced directly through Maighstir Sachairi, remove the 'Catholic' experience of God's Hand in nature, and replace it with Sachairi's recognition of an earthly evil:

> An unpleasant awareness of himself came creeping over him … And now the sunlight seemed unkind, and the river and the leafy trees were no longer an eyes'-delight; rather he had the impression that in that glance something repulsive had momentarily shown itself behind their seeming innocence. As if he had detected Evil lurking under the display of pleasant Spring.[30]

So, Mac Colla's prose takes the physical environment of the Highlands and attributes to it a reflection of the situation of the people within it. In contrast to the Celtic

[29] Mac Colla, 1995, p.1.
[30] Mac Colla, 1995, p.90.

Twilight writing of the previous century, Mac Colla's physical descriptions do away with romantic or idyllic pictures.

Mac Colla has his characters identify and utilise the natural environment in marking out a distinct cultural identity. In the passage of *The Albannach* to which Hunter is referring, Murdo is in conversation at Iain Beag's workshop where like-minded men '…that had a liking for the old songs and sgeulachd and for conversation of the speculative kind' gather.[31] Here, he listens to the men discuss the nature of Gaelic place-names:

> …the name of every place will be a picture of what will be there, so that a man will almost know a place on its first seeing by its likeness to the name that will be on it. Say Achadh nam beith to a Gaelic man and he will be seeing in his mind a level place and the birch trees growing here and there, and they white and slender.[32]

This is an example of Gaelic identity as it is established through its connection to the local environment, and parallels are drawn between the differences that the Gaels in the novel perceive between their own native culture and the cultures they see as alien to them. 'Is it not a queer language the English?' asks one of the characters at the workshop:

> There's a great gabble of long words in it to be sure and there's a great number of people that will be speaking it…but there's no music in it at all that I could ever hear and the queerest thing in it is that the words seem to have no meaning to them…will a man of you tell me what Achbay or Achnasheen will mean in the Beurla, or what kind of a place is in Lowestoft or Dover?[33]

Distinguishing a culture as 'different' is a very obvious process of identification. In his essay *A Short Survey of Classic Scottish Writing* (2001) Alasdair Gray identifies that geographical and cultural difference are the components of this process:

[31] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 67.
[32] Ibid., p.70.
[33] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 70-71.

> Nations are made by folk in a particular kind of land reacting to each other and to neighbours outside, so any good atlas will show why a country's way of life, government and writing differ from those of neighbouring lands, if it shows differences of soil and climate. [34]

The influence of poetry will be examined later, but Gray's observations highlight Mac Colla's keen awareness of the importance of cultural differences in establishing personal and national cultural identity – in the case of Gaelic, the traditional poetry and song serves as a sort of 'cultural atlas' of their individuality and unique traditions within the geographical confines of 'place'. In *The Albannach*, Mac Colla made use of all the links in this 'cultural atlas' to highlight the uniqueness of Gaelic culture, crucially illuminating what he termed to be '… that special sighting of Reality which can not be attained save through the window of Gaidhlig.' [35]

The Significance of Music

For Mac Colla, music was '…one of the principal influences of my life, at times the greatest,' and the eloquence of the descriptive language used in *The Albannach* has a musical quality derived from the Gaelic language.[36] Indeed, so striking was this form of using Gaelic idioms in English-language literature that Mac Colla firmly believed he had started a trend:

> Not only A, B, and C, but even X, Y, and Z tried their hand at being a 'Highland novelist' – 'It will be a fine day that will be in it, whatever', and so forth – so that not many years after the original publication I knew that I could never use the same style again without seeming to write a parody of a parody of myself.[37]

This is an interesting observation on the representation of 'highland idioms' in twentieth-century Scottish literature. *Whisky Galore* (1947) by Compton Mackenzie,

[34] Alasdair Gray, *A Short Survey of Classic Scottish Writing* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), p.1.
[35] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 56.
[36] Mac Colla, 1975, p. 63.
[37] Mac Colla, in Morrison,1973, p. 14.

for example, or Lillian Beckwith's *The Hills is Lonely* (1959) are examples of how it was used popularly for less serious, comedic effect:

> Its just now I saw your advert when I got the book for the knitting pattern I wanted from my cousin Catriona. I am sorry I did not write sooner if you are fixed up if you are not in any way fixed up I have a good house stone and tiles and my brother Ruari who will wash down with lime twice every year. Ruari is married and lives just by. She is not damp. I live by myself and you could have the room that is not a kitchen and bedroom reasonable. I was in the kitchen of the lairds house till lately when he was changed God rest his soul the poor old gentleman that he was. You would be very welcomed. I have a cow also for milk and eggs and the minister at the manse will be referee if you wish such. PS. She is not thatched.[38]

The varied use of language in 'Modern Highland fiction' was being highlighted as an important literary device at least as early as the 1930s. The following newspaper article by William Power, the author of *Literature and Oatmeal: What Literature Means to Scotland* (1935) and SNP party leader (1940-42), is another interesting example of this issue.

> William Black, though not a regionalist, was a pioneer in modern Highland fiction, and the inventor of novelistic Highland-English. Stevenson, going out from Edinburgh, as Scott had done, applied to Jacobite romance a delightful new method, which has been stated [?] in the works of his countless imitators. But the first true picture of the Highlands was given by Neil Munro, a native born Gael, who rendered in beautiful English the idiom of the Gaelic soul. His novels, a German critic has remarked, constitute an almost complete lexicon of Highland character. For Munro, an artist to the core, the Highlands were a subject and not a problem, and their real life was in the past. Later writers like Neil Gunn and Ian MacPherson, reluctant to accept the postulate of moribundity, have dealt with in a more critical and 'realistic' fashion with the social history and modern life of the Highlands. The Highland novels of Fionn Mac Colla, L.A.G. Strong, and James Barke look almost like attempts at blood-transfusion.[39]

It is also interesting to note the anecdote which appears in MacDiarmid's *Lucky Poet* with regard to Mac Colla's opinion of Power:

> I certainly think literally true of an appalling proportion of our population what Fionn MacColla … said to me in Edinburgh one day of mutual friend, William Power … 'Here comes Power' said Tom. 'You know, if he suddenly

[38] Lillian Beckwith, *The Hills is Lonely* (Essex: Arrow Books, 1959), p.10.
[39] William Power, *The Scotsman*, 20 October 1938, p 6.

> started barking instead of speaking, at least five minutes would elapse before anyone realized that anything out of the ordinary was happening.'[40]

Mac Colla's personal appreciation of music and his understanding of its important role in traditional Gaelic society play a large part in *The Albannach* because it is a further way in which the Gael can be defined as unique. In an essay entitled 'The Roles of Music in Society', Andrew Gregory recognises the connection between music, culture and place which supports the notion of music as a definitive cultural identifier:

> Music is a powerful means of creating a sense of belonging, either to a particular ethnic group or to a place. Stokes (1994) states 'Music is socially meaningful…largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them'.[41]

Music, poetry, language and landscape are all elements of Gaelic culture which are easily identified and reinforce an individual's cultural identity. Clearly, Mac Colla was deeply attracted to denoted ideas of identity through music.

'All identity is active statement. It communicates its being to the surrounding world through a set of more or less clear, impressive and complicated signals. We *are* so far as we can declare ourselves to be…' writes Steiner.[42] The Gael, in this case, identifies with place and time through poetry and song that have been communicated for generations. It is because the connections between these cultural traditions are so deeply ingrained in traditional Gaelic society that they are used as examples here: 'Poetry is perennially saved from esotericism by the need for a public' as Derick Thomson has it, continuing, '…there is a good deal of evidence that people who had

[40] Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1943), p. 103.
[41] Andrew Gregory, 'The Roles of Music in Society: The Ethnomusicological Perspective', in *The Social Psychology of Music*, ed. by David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.131.
[42] George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (Middlesex: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 67.

never been professional poets composed bardic verse.'[43] The transmission of this declaration of Gaelic life is the property not only of the Bard, but of the entire community. In *The Albannach* Mac Colla makes this declaration through the voice of Murdo Anderson, the crofter's son who rediscovers the ability to declare himself a part of Gaelic culture, its history and its place, and restore to a community too long in a condition of silence the capacity to make an active statement of cultural and communal identity. *The Albannach* ends in triumph. Murdo, having rediscovered his own cultural identity, restores it to his community and both are sustained.

Mac Colla's reaction to the decline of Gaelic culture emphasises that these beliefs were established early in his life, as we have seen, but these beliefs are central only insomuch as they are positioned with reference to mankind. 'Throughout his writings, he emphasises his belief in Unity – the Unity of God, of mankind, of the nation, of the individual – and in the disastrous results that follow when this unity is breached' as Derrick McClure notes.[44] Mac Colla's decision to enlighten and unite his fictional community in *The Albannach* by means of the time-honoured cultural traditions that it had suppressed is a demonstration of his belief in the human being and their power to overcome what he saw as the lies of a religious authority:

> …If the nature of man is totally and radically corrupt and evil, it followed as an ineluctable corollary that everything that emerges from that nature and is an expression of it, such as the whole creative life of man – such as specifically the entire body of the poetry, music and literature of the Gael – was in itself evil and therefore requiring to be stamped out.[45]

In *Too Long in this Condition,* Mac Colla enlightens his readership as to the precise nature of the importance of music to Gaelic culture and its survival. '…*The Gael* (and the Scots in general as they were by *nature*) *were much more than merely a*

[43] Thomson, 1974, p.19.
[44] J. Derrick McClure, 'Fionn Mac Colla. Unity Through Trilingualism', in *Literature of the North*, ed. by David Hewitt and Michael Spiller (Aberdeen University Press, 1983), p. 162.
[45] Mac Colla, 1984, iv.

musical people. For them LIFE WAS ITSELF A MUSICAL EXPERIENCE. Even the possible approach of death did not halt it.'[46] To stamp out the music and poetry, the culture of the Gael, and to class it as vanity and against God's laws is, in Mac Colla's view, the first step in the process of stamping out the Gaels themselves. His characters' only defence against this is the rediscovery of the creative and expressive human experience. Music, '…of all influences perhaps the most dangerous,'[47] is the most effective method of resistance at their disposal, and Murdo Anderson articulates this resistance.

The role of the 'orator' in Gaelic society has often been a varied one. John Purser has written extensively on the subject of music in Scottish society and has highlighted the importance of this definition: 'Nowadays we use "bard" to cover both bard and fili, but it seems that the bards were the musicians, whereas the functions of the fili were much more than artistic. They were historians, genealogists and even prophets.' [48] The orator covered a wide range of functions within the traditional Gaelic society. Music and poetry were used not simply to entertain, but served an important societal function. The tracing of genealogical lines and the recording of historic events are all functions which contribute to the continuation of both the society and its culture which mark it as unique. They were invaluable and powerful members of a society which was largely illiterate. Martin Martin[49] recorded, first hand, the experience of this power over a community:

> The Orators by the force of their Eloquence had a powerful Ascendant over the greatest Man in their time; for if any Orator did but ask the Habit, Arms, Horse, or any other thing belonging to the greatest Man in these Islands, it was readily granted them, sometimes out of respect, and sometimes for fear of

[46] Mac Colla,1975, p. 65.
[47] Ibid., p. 64.
[48] John Purser, *Scotland's Music*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1992), p. 71.
[49] Martin Martin (c. 1660-1719) was a university-educated Gaelic speaker from Skye who recorded his travels through the Western Isles.

> being exclaimed against by Satire, which in those days was reckon'd a great dishonour.[50]

The traditional role of the Bard and the power that came with this position is invoked in *The Albannach* as a catalyst through which Murdo Anderson is able to re-energize the community. When Murdo begins composing comic songs about the 'life-denying' god-fearing patriarchs of the community, he directly challenges their authority by deflating their pomposity, with the local minister (also Murdo's father in law), Mr John MacIver, his most obvious target. MacIver's distrust of, and distaste for, the traditional endeavours of Gaelic culture typifies the conflict between that culture and Calvinism, or the 'yea' versus 'nay' attitudes which Mac Colla describes as being among the most critical aspects of the decline of Gaelic. 'I hear you will be going every day to the house of ungodly men…and there you will be spending your time in vain singing and jesting' says MacIver to Murdo after a chance meeting along the road one day. [51] This attitude is the inspiration Murdo uses for his lampooning of the minister in song and, consequently, he is able to loosen the psychological stranglehold on the community through his newfound role as a Bard:

> The song went through the place like a fire and set two parishes a-laughing. For many a day the mere appearance of Mr. John MacIver on the road at a distance was the signal for laughing and chuckling, and the first Sabbath he could hardly get through his first sermon in peace for the giggling there was among the young people and they stuffing their handkerchiefs into their mouths…And not only he was aware of the change. The godly woke up to find their authority shattered and the fashion of constipation and the long face fallen into perpetual disrepute. They were at their wits' end, but not the godliest among them dared say a word openly for fear Murchadh Iain Ruaidh would make a song about them.[52]

[50] Martin, Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, ed. by D.J. Macleod (Stirling: [n.p.], 1934) p. 176.
[51] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 316.
[52] Mac Colla, 1984, pp. 318-319.

Murdo's name is changed in this passage from Murdo Anderson to Murchadh Iain Ruaidh, literally, Murdo, son of Red John. The identification of him through the use of his Gaelic name establishes Murdo's own re-identification with Gaelic as he finds and accepts his place within the society. His reputation grows throughout the community as a composer of songs and poetry and his Gaelic name asserts the novel's emphasis on the distinct qualities of identification in the Gaelic language. Just as we have seen earlier with the use of Gaelic place-names, anyone hearing the name Murchadh Iain Ruaidh, would know exactly who was being spoken about and would watch their tongues. Power is seized through liberating self-confidence.

The Gaelic Youth

In *The Albannach*, Mac Colla is essentially highlighting the problems he recognised as affecting Gaelic society in the era of its sharpest decline. His attempts to address these issues and present them as a realistic examination of the Gael in the 1920s brought Gaelic into a modern context. Francis Thomson, writer and Gaelic campaigner, contributes to David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, by highlighting the situation of the Gael that Mac Colla was eager to address:

> …depressed, suppressed, caricatured, relegated to the status of a second-class citizen (mainly because of the language he spoke)…The Gael was also denied a full place in the arena of political administration which dictated his style of living and its standard almost to the last letter; he was the possessor of a culture of a thousand years' standing which was regarded as quaint and so was disregarded. [53]

The novel also pays particular attention to the way that the young people of the Highlands perceive Gaelic culture.

[53] Francis Thompson, 'Mac Colla and the Gaidhealtachd', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison, 72-78 (p. 72).

Throughout the book, there is an emphasis on the young, and their distancing themselves from Gaelic culture in favour of the more fashionable English. The need for young Gaels to engage with the language is a clear message in *The Albannach*. Anderson is constantly exhausted at the emerging dominance of English in every facet of his life. Once he is married to Annie, for example, he discovers that she is forever burying her head in trashy romance stories, a habit that he abhors:

> It was in her role of sixpenny heroine that she would always be speaking in that silly mincing English. The Gaelic was not good enough for her – although she would always be more at home in it, and her English was very bad. He himself if he had to speak to anyone at all would always use the Gaelic, and it was the Gaelic he would always speak in the house, while she, the daughter of a bitch, would reply in her English. It was a grotesque situation.[54]

English is highlighted here as the language of progress or for bettering oneself. Anderson opposes this. 'The Gaelic was not good enough' for Annie. This is a familiar enough scenario for any Gaelic speaker. Here too though, the English idiom is specifically selected to embrace the power of colloquial Gaelic expression along with Murdo's darkening frustration: 'daughter of a bitch' which is unusual, and even bland in English, has much more force in the Gaelic as 'Nighean na Galla.' This gives *The Albannach* an interesting depth for the Gaelic speaker which perhaps an English speaker would not notice, and this adds credence to Mac Colla's notions of language as a unique window on to the world. It is clear to any Gaelic speaker that in *The Albannach*, Mac Colla is exploring the uses of this unique window to the fullest, even when writing in English. He wrote in 'Mein Bumpf', that '*The Albannach* was also intended as a sharp awakening slap in the matter of language', and that: 'Language in fact is the whole thing. Poetry is untranslatable, and exactly insofar as it *is* poetry. But language itself – and the more it tends to utterance – is untranslatable, but it is

[54] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 252-3.

translatable *enough*. Something can be caught of the peculiar light from the infinite that is entangled in it – and would never shine on earth otherwise.'[55] The use of language in *The Albannach* will be examined in detail throughout this chapter, but for the time being, it should be kept in mind that Mac Colla was utterly convinced of the importance of Gaelic to the well-being of the Scottish people as a whole:

> Fifty years ago millions of Scots, much more than half the nation, lived and died hardly ever having heard the word Gaelic…*The Albannach* was intended to break through this barrier of ignorance and bring the existence of the living, surviving language to the notice of a benighted public.[56]

One key turning point in *The Albannach* is the re-engagement of the people, especially the young, with the native culture. Murdo watches and listens to them over the course of the seasons and eventually begins to notice the change in their attitude to the goings on at Iain Beag's workshop where he would join like-minded fellows to play the pipes, tell stories and engage in other traditional cultural activities:

> *Ach*, they had been in the habit of saying, looking superior, *they'll only be singing the Gaylic songs whatever* - but recently the place had begun to get a name for high spirits, one or two excellent jests were traced there that had caused the neighbourhood to titter, so that it came to be said among them: *There will always be some fun going at Iain Beag's.*[57]

In the 1930s, the threat to indigenous Scottish languages from English was taken seriously and utilised by writers like Mac Colla to make political statements. The year before *The Albannach* was published, MacDiarmid published an article that criticised 'English ascendancy' in literature. MacDiarmid's article examines the condescending attitude towards Gaelic culture by some in Scotland in favour of English as a preferred artistic medium. He compares the situation with that of Ireland and states that 'It is time, so far as Scottish literature is concerned, to do as the Irish

[55] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p. 14.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., p.315.

have done in their case, and reverse the attitude that has hitherto prevailed.'[58]

MacDiarmid and Mac Colla were reacting against the impact of the English ascendancy in Britain which they saw as engendering in Scotland that most serious of cultural dangers – a country dividing against itself. MacDiarmid continues with reference to Scottish poetry:

> The phases of Scottish poetry – the lets and hindrances of its evolution – cannot be properly understood if the fact that great poets like Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair, Duncan Ban MacIntyre, and Iain Lom wrote gloriously of Scotland and Scottish matters in a language of which the great majority of Scottish people know nothing, but against which they are still deeply prejudiced, is not taken into consideration.[59]

MacDiarmid champions the importance of Gaelic culture to Scotland through its literature and recognises what the consequences for the whole nation would be, should certain attitudes go unchecked. Mac Colla also chooses to focus on the prejudices towards Gaelic which to some degree, come from the Gaelic community itself. Murdo becomes increasingly angry at what he considers to be the complicit nature of the Gaels in their own stagnation. While still at University in Glasgow, he attends a class designed to help the Highlanders improve their English by participating in debates and he reacts furiously to a speech declaring that the Clearances had helped to develop the Highlands:

> Murdo was in a cold fury of indignation. He said he wished to disagree. They were orgies of rape and theft, of destruction and bloody murder. Any Highlander who glorified in them was a slave. Their 'heritage' was a farce and a delusion. It was to clean the pots for the English. Their language was to die in two generations. They deserved it. They were assisting in their own annihilation. Their name would rightly stink in the nostrils of every honourable man until the end of time.[60]

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[58] MacDiarmid in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland, 1918-1939*, ed. Margery Palmer McCulloch, p.282.
[59] Ibid
[60] Mac Colla, 1984, p. 147-8.

This particular attitude is shown to develop from the young Gaelic men at university who use their education and learning to create a gulf between them and their embarrassing native communities. Murdo himself is guilty of this to a degree, but his own prejudices stem from a much more complex resentment.[61] Murdo's scorn is for both those Gaels who turn their back on their own culture and embrace English *as well* as those Gaels who reject learning and the wider world. This paradoxical conflict in the novel clearly stems from Murdo's inability to harmonise these two sides of his own psyche. As an archetypal 'angry young man', he is at odds with the inhabitants of his village to varying degrees. First, he regards the inhabitants of his village as ignorant of the pleasures in life: learning, music, poetry. In their place he

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[61] In the period before *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*, although the Clearances had not necessarily been dealt with as a dramatized subject matter, notable works of history and criticism had been available. Tom Johnston's *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (Glasgow: Forward, 1920) is a socialistic, critical indictment of the landowning classes who had forced the peasantry from the land in the previous century. 'Now his [the Landowner's] peasantry was a source of weakness', Johnston writes (Johnston, 1920, p.184). Johnston is able to present the Clearances as an injustice of the capitalist system, arguing from a left-wing perspective that the Clearances were an act of oppression committed by the elite nobility against the poor. Mac Colla would argue that the Clearances were an act of subjugation, committed by 'anglified' landowners, against the Gaelic population whom they despised, having become English in their custom and culture and wholly devolved from the people who had traditionally inhabited their lands. Johnston highlights the Lowland Clearances of the eighteenth century, noting that '…For weeks [in 1724] Galloway was ruled by the pragmatical communists' who had refused to be cleared (Ibid., p.184). Johnston places twentieth-century notions of universal socialism at the centre of historical injustice in Scotland in order to build a historical case against the contemporary political situation.

Mac Colla placed his own politics within the Clearances. It appears that during this heavily politicised period in Scottish and British society, writers with political agendas were applying historical aspects to current political circumstances. Hence, Johnston's interpretation of the Clearances was that of a socialist struggle against capitalism and landowners; Mac Colla followed this argument as we can see in his own criticisms of the capitalist system in the *Cuis na Canain* articles, but he also added a clearly politicised cultural dimension to the Clearances, in line with his own cultural nationalism, as is presented in Fearchar's conversation with Sachairi in *And the Cock Crew*, and in Murdo Anderson's self-awareness throughout *The Albannach*.

Johnston spends little time discussing the cultural implications of the Highland Clearances but, rather, highlights the worsening conditions of life in general for the peasantry, quoting heavily from historical sources such as *The New Statistical Account* and Alexander Mackenzie. As a result, the book is rather clinical and does little to argue for Home Rule. Mac Colla's presentation of the Clearances, on the other hand, is dramatic and argues for a State developed through demonstrations of cultural and linguistic oppression. Johnston attacks the capitalist system, and cites the greed of the aristocracy as the cause behind the Clearances. He notes, for example, that 'Everything short of actual instantaneous murder was done in Sutherlandshire at the beginning of the last century to exterminate the working class' (Ibid., p. 197). When Johnston turns his attentions to the Highlands, his language is as fierce as Mac Colla's: 'North of the River Forth the evictions of human beings for sheep was carried on with so great a barbarity and on so colossal a scale as to arouse the anger and disgust of the whole civilised world' (Ibid., p. 189).

sees only the stifling religious authority and the monotony of the rural life of a people which he sees as secular both in mind and in spirit though stamped through with religious intolerance. His alienation is established early in the novel during a conversation with his father, Iain Ruadh, an elder in the church:

> '…I'd like to know what you've been up to all this time you're supposed to be going to the well!'
> 'I was looking at the sunset.'
> 'Looking at the sunset, a chreutair![62] Looking at the sunset! Here's your faather no better than a slave the way he's working and you, ye sgalag, won't do a hand's turn. Ye should be ashamed of yourself, if you've any shame left in you. Going to the Univarsity this year an' ye can do nothing to help your faather for looking at the sunset! But that's what's wrong with ye!' Worshipping the crayter more than the creator, that's what's wrong with ye!...' [63]

Murdo sees this attitude reflected in almost the entire community. While it should be remembered that the novel is written from Murdo's perspective, and that 'the other characters tend to have their reality defined only in terms of Murdo's perception of them…'[64] as Herdman writes, it is possible that he projects his father's attitude on to everyone else he sees as being under the control of the church and in his rebellion against his father he rebels against the entire community. However, he is also intensely irritated by the way in which some people do attempt to engage with the modern world; they attempt to speak to him in English and they dress in modern 'city' clothes. They are, to him, just as accountable for the decline in Gaelic as any others. He sees the Gaelic people who use English as the grotesque combination of two cultures they little understand. Mac Colla makes this apparent in the Gaels' use of English in the novel, their accents and pronunciation highlighted for effect.

> 'Ah well, Ah well, yes Gaylic,' says MacAskill, pretending he had not understood. 'Well, you see I wass brought up in Stornoway and we always

[62] A play on words using the Gaelic word for creature and the slang term for the Devil, which is also a euphemism for 'drink'.
[63] Mac Colla, 1984, p.7.
[64] John Herdman, 'The Albannach', *Lines Review*, 41 (1972), 18-21, (p. 18).

> spoke English in the house, so that I don't know Gaylic. A fine language no doubt, but I neffer learned it myself.'[65]

The portrayal is one of a sorry and culturally confused people, though typically, Mac Colla demonstrates his own humorous and satirical abilities in these moments. Again, with reference to Annie:

> Of course she would be mincing and mumbling away at the Beurla. One of these stupid asses that thought any kind of mangled English was more respectable than the good mouth-filling Gaelic that would have given a kind of dignity to even their conversation that would only be fatuous in any other language on earth.[66]

The example of the Gaelic community neglecting its own language highlights some of the attitudes that Mac Colla was reacting against but Murdo's contempt for it all draws a deeper meaning as McClure elaborates: 'Symbolically, their language marks these people as "rejects": they have betrayed or abandoned their Gaelic origins, but have been unable to naturalise themselves in the rival culture.'[67] This is one example (though there are countless others) of the lingering shock that a traditional community experiences during the process of modernisation. Here, it is initially forced through clearance and once the will is broken it is subsequently adopted willingly. Murdo rebels against both sides which he sees as being opposed both to him and to Gaelic – he maintains that the culture has been destroyed, robbed and imposed upon by a Calvinist religious authority and English imperialism. Like Mac Colla, he sees the whole picture of Gaelic decline as a continual and deliberate process, from the forced evictions of the past to the final dilution of the culture through the opening of the Highlands to Britain. Murdo is a symptom of this change, born in an age where a young man of his intelligence is afforded the opportunity to leave his community behind and enter the modern world where his culture is of no benefit financially; he is

[65] Mac Colla, 1984, p.150.
[66] Ibid., p. 50.
[67] McClure in Hewitt and Spiller (eds.), 1983, p.166.

torn between the past and the present and represents the difficult transitional phase of full indoctrination into the empire.

There is no illusion that by the end of the novel Murdo has saved Gaelic. He has, rather, harmonised the two sides of his own personality that make up the whole – a symbol for Scotland, perhaps? Murdo himself struggles to keep these elements locked together. 'Scotland as shown by its linguistic condition has become so devitalised as to be virtually incapable of making any decipherable signal at all denoting identity. This means that it is in a condition near to total death…'[68] Mac Colla writes in his autobiography. Murdo, at least, is able to act decisively before it is too late, though his acts in the novel's final chapters are as much for his own benefit as for the community.

Mac Colla began a follow up story to *The Albannach*, left unfinished, untitled and as yet unpublished. The story, written in the first person, and again from the perspective of Murdo Anderson, picks up decades after the original and gives an enlightening view as to the importance of re-identification with place, culture and language, and the redemptive nature of the unity of such elements within the psyche, which Mac Colla felt was so important to the well-being of Scotland:

> *The Albannach* left me at the point where I had reached, after a soul-shaking rebellious struggle, an inward acceptance of my lot as bound to be thence forward to the end of my life a crofter and merchant and small shop-keeper here on my croft of Druim-a-choirce, with a final renunciation of all my hopes of university study…Now I thank God for what seemed then my final misfortune.[69]

The Albannach can be criticised as working towards a slightly naïve conclusion. Murdo, having overcome his frustrated anguish, embraces a truly Gaelic identity and restores its affirmations to the mainstream of the community, pipes a tune

[68] Mac Colla, 1975, p.52.
[69] NLS DEP 265/25 (Notebook).

over the glens and all is well. Mac Colla could be accused of being naïve himself, in believing that a 'pure' Gaelic identity could be restored to the Gaidhealtachd to free and save the souls of those Scots who are awakened through its call. But, the ending of the novel is not a vision of Utopia. *The Albannach* is a call to arms and Mac Colla's agenda was to rouse an affirming Gaelic revival in the Highlands and Islands not only to halt the dissolution of the Gaelic language, but also to embolden a call for Scottish independence. The language itself was at once the most crucial, the most threatened, and at the same time the most potent weapon. He was firmly convinced that it was this language, as he wrote in *The Free Man*, which was: '…in the long run ...the only weapon…wherewith Scotland might successfully beat back the encroaching forces of Anglicisation and recover her complete self.'[70] It may seem fanciful today, but in the early 1930s the possibility for a revolution with a firm basis around language and identity seemed to be possible, especially to young, politically-minded nationalists like Fionn Mac Colla. After all, he was twenty-three when he sat down to write the book and *The Albannach* has been described as 'a young man's book.'[71] Nevertheless, it is an example of the work of a man who, at a time when Scottish nationalism was in its political infancy, chose to focus on the Gaelic world as a medium through which he could express his concerns and maddening frustration at a situation where:

> The dominance of the language and culture of England, and the minor place assigned to those of Scotland, in the process by which the mental habits of Scots are formed is a fact of Scottish life so fundamental as to be no longer even noticed, much less challenged, by most people in Scotland.[72]

[70] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Cùis na Cànain II', *The Free Man*, 29 July 1933, 4-5, (p.4).
[71] Herdman, 1972, p. 19.
[72] McClure in Hewitt and Spiller (eds), 1983, p.165.

Cultural and Political Contexts for *The Albannach*

In a chapter from David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, Tom Scott attempts to get to the heart of Mac Colla's legacy. 'A Note on *The Albannach*' discusses the themes of the novel as one would expect, from a critical standpoint, but part of Scott's essay is about the ineffable: 'Things are not only things' Scott writes. 'They have meanings for poets to see.'[73] In a sense, as can be evidenced from the first few pages of the novel, *The Albannach* is a story about poetry – it is about the music of the spirit in the culture of the Gael. 'Culture is a living, involved DOING, it has nothing to do with academic intellectualism.'[74] Scott writes. Scott argues that *The Albannach* is not about Gaels, but about all Celtic people. The book is about 'life' and it is difficult for academic criticism to adequately relate the spirituality to which this refers. This 'spirituality' might appear to resist forensic literary analysis, yet as we have seen, it is Mac Colla's intention to relate it to political realities and the prospect of material change. The means by which this is to be brought about is, for Mac Colla, in the Gaelic language, and this is to be conveyed through the novel's English-language medium. It is the contention of this chapter that *The Albannach*, from its very title, to its legacy and social message, is unmistakeably and unremittingly a Gaelic text.

To properly gauge the impact and cultural importance of Mac Colla's novel, it is necessary to place it not only within the cultural context of the period in which it was written, but also in a historical context of criticism and reviews which have appeared in various newspapers and journals, and which vary greatly in their approach to this work, spanning the eighty years since it first came to print.

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[73] Scott in Morrison, 1973, p.66.
[74] Ibid.

And the Cock Crew is considered by many to be Mac Colla's masterpiece. In it he details the 'downfall' of Gaeldom, and the complex relationship which the language had with Calvinism. *The Albannach*, in comparison, is a 'foreword' to the dialectical argument which is the main focus of the later novel. As in *And the Cock Crew*, the 'aggressor' in *The Albannach* is the Calvinism which stifles freedom of thought and expression. It is important to keep in mind, however, that we are not presented so much with cultural oppression in *The Albannach*, but stagnation and silence – emptiness, or even, an emptying. The decline of a language rarely happens quickly. It is a process which can take generations and *The Albannach* is a snapshot of the contemporary situation and attitudes in the 1920s and 1930s. Mac Colla suggests that this rather ineffectual attitude had been able to permeate a place where pride, confidence and hope had been vanquished. This defeat manifests itself through cultural and spiritual frustrations which signpost the wasteland inhabited by those unfortunates left behind who must suffer the banshees of 'progress', 'empire', and the punishment of God.

Of the many critics who have claimed Mac Colla's first novel as a watershed, Francis Thompson is one of the most outspoken. A Gael, from the island of Lewis, Thompson feels the importance of Mac Colla's work keenly:

> *The Albannach* by Fionn Mac Colla was the first novel out of Scotland to treat life in the Gaidhealtachd in an authentic, realistic and almost documentary manner. Had Mac Colla been a journalist rather than a novelist, perhaps he might have achieved a greater recognition for himself, with beneficial spin-offs for the region with which he was associated in that he would have squashed flat and given the lie to all the literary rubbish which came out of the Highlands, purporting to be authentic but written by strangers.[75]

The above quotation, taken from 'Mac Colla and the Gaidhealtachd' which appeared in David Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla,* highlights important issues

[75] Francis Thompson, 'Mac Colla and the Gaidhealtachd', in *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, ed. by David Morrison, p.72.

regarding the social contexts behind *The Albannach*. Firstly, Thompson describes Mac Colla's portrayal of the Gaidhealtachd as 'realistic' and 'authentic'. Mac Colla himself, however, found a natural opposition in these concepts. Writing in the foreword to the 1971 reprint (also reprinted in the 1984 edition), Mac Colla explains this important difference:

> It was the first novel to treat life in a *realistic* manner. The works of Neil Munro for instance are irradiated and suffused with the unique flavour of Gaelic life in a way which is totally authentic and beyond praise. But they are otherwise marred by a treatment exempt from circumstance, by the pushing back of the events to former and distant ages, in other words by romanticisation – a course forced upon Munro by his refusal to come to grips with the realities of the situation of the Gael in his day. That was the responsibility which I accepted in *The Albannach*. With it the modern Gael, as he was in his actual conditions, for the first time stepped on to the stage…[76]

For both Thompson and Mac Colla, the region and its people had not been fairly represented. Mac Colla's foreword was written before Thompson's essay appeared and clearly differentiates between 'realistic' and 'authentic'. However, Mac Colla and Thompson both recognised that there was a need for a readjustment of the focus with regard to the representation of the Gaidhealtachd in literature. Mac Colla was reacting against what he considered to be a lack of *realism* in the literature which was associated with the Highlands regardless of its intended audience.

'The Highlands' traditionally occupies a place in literature which is reassuring or reliable to some extent. By and large, it is a place entirely dominated by its geography: this is not subject to urban development and it does not change. It has become typical of the dramatic, rugged setting for adventure or tragedy. Conversely, it is a place where parochial 'characters' exist (in the islands in particular), with 'heather in their ears', often speaking in a comedic Anglo/Gaelic patois. This is not the place envisioned in *The Albannach*. Murdo Anderson needed to take his rightful

[76] Mac Colla, 1984, i.

place in a region hitherto populated with characters like Evan Dubh, Rob Roy and Para Handy. The extreme seems to be between the romantic hero, and the loveable buffoon, but is almost always intended for an outside audience. In Murdo Anderson, the angry young man of the Gaidhealtachd could vent the frustrations of being completely overlooked on the one hand, and being completely misrepresented on the other. Thompson discusses this unrealistic image, focussing, with great respect, on Neil Munro:

> While Neil Munro produced writing which was shot through with the flavour of Gaelic life, the result was rather remote and in many ways Munro contributed to the 'romantic' idea that all aspects of life and living in the Highlands were much to be sought after (though strangely this life was not so sophisticated that crowds migrated to the region to partake of the idyllic existence which the islanders of the Hebrides were supposed to have for the asking).[77]

Mac Colla deals with Sir Walter Scott:

> I wish I could remember who records an episode when Sir Walter Scott returning from a Scottish evening, as all evenings in Edinburgh in his days were perforce Scottish evenings, suddenly stopped in the late streets and turning his face to the wall burst into tears. It had suddenly come home to him what direction things were taking, and what was going to happen to Scotland itself, its simple lapse into Nothing. Perhaps a point of his regretful stress – one would hope so – was due to his realisation of the part he himself had played and through his writings was going to play in this, with the exaggeration of a historical-cultural accident into a supposed rigid, ethnic fact, and his ridicule and caricature of the Gael, of whom he actually knew less than nothing.[78]

The anecdote may be apocryphal,[79] but the sentiment that lay behind Mac Colla's attitude is clear: the Gaidhealtachd had been dramatised and fictionalised to the detriment of the reality of its people and their language. In the 1970s, Thompson too identified that aside from doing no real good for the Gaidhealtachd, there was the possibility that a certain element of 'Highland' writing, was a serious problem:

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[77] Thompson in Morrison, 1973, p.72.
[78] Mac Colla, 1975, p.24.
[79] See J.G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, (Edition of 1900, London), Vol. 1, p.460.

> This output of writing was of no use to the Highlander and the Islander; indeed, it probably did a lot of harm. I am thinking here in terms of social writing, writing produced by a writer conscious of the fact that the Highlander was regarded unfairly as 'white trash'. One need only look at the washed-out literary effusions produced by visitors to the Hebrides in the first two or three decades of this century to accept that the 'twilight' into which these islands were plunged (though the days were as bright as those anywhere) cast a gloom over their inhabitants until even they accepted that they were part of a human menagerie as were the St. Kildans in their time.[80]

Although he doesn't level these accusations at Scott or Munro, Thompson's attitude is symptomatic of the realisation that the Highlands were *suffering* from a literature which didn't reflect the reality of the Gaidhealtachd. Thompson acknowledged what Mac Colla had also hoped; that through prose (a medium which few Gaels had successfully employed) the Highlands could have valid representations. Indeed, the stark reality of the social and cultural situation in the Highlands reflected in *The Albannach* drew exaggerated responses in the newspapers of the day, which will be examined shortly. Thompson, however, acknowledges that *The Albannach* had never received the recognition which could have developed into the 'beneficial spin-offs' which the region needed. Indeed, up to the 1970s when 'Mac Colla and the Gaidhealtachd' was written, the situation appeared to be no better:

> The annual Mod effusions of such bodies as An Comunn Gaidhealach, especially designed for the expatriate Gael who, once assimilated in the cultures of Glasgow and Edinburgh, actively denied their language and heritage, more than strengthened the opinion of those who had it in their power to cultivate what was left of Gaelic and its culture, that the Highlander would not help himself and was therefore in no way eligible for State aid. Decades spent in the practice of forelock-tugging by the Gael eventually resulted in the Gael being well and truly dug into a rut in which, even in the decade of the Seventies of the present century, he still exists, accepting his bread from the hands of strangers and having his very history written by them.[81]

[80] Thompson in Morrison, 1973, p.72.
[81] Thompson in Morrison (ed.,) 1973, 73.

The purpose of *The Albannach* is to show the realistic situation of Gaelic in the 1920s and 30s in Scotland. Gaelic language and culture are its focus. Ned Thomas argues that 'a healthy language, like a healthy body, does not need to have its temperature taken all the time'.[82] Can the Gael be accused today of occupying a position of cultural or linguistic hypochondria when the symptoms are so apparent? *The Albannach* still brings these symptoms to the fore.

The Albannach has gathered varying degrees of critical attention since its publication in 1932. Scott's essay in Morrison's *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla,* 'A Note on *The Albannach'* had appeared under the title 'Novel that Marked a Watershed and the Man who Wrote It' in February 1972, in *The Scots Independent*, upon the occasion of the book's first reprint in 1971. Scott's analysis of the language Mac Colla uses in *The Albannach* relates the book to Scotland and the 'Celto-Teutonic people drawn from Gaels, Britons, Picts (also Britonic people) Angles, Saxons, and Norsemen':

> The essentially Celtic quality in this book is chiefly Gaelic: the very language has a Gaelic accent of mind. It gives one the feeling that the book was first written in Gaelic then literally translated into its English equivalents, idiom and all … Mac Colla is under strong, irresistible compulsion to use a Gaelic idiom to express himself and his vision. This sets his work apart from the Celtic Twilight of such men as Fiona Macleod (William Sharp) or even Neil Munro, or in Ireland John Synge. … But such reconciliation is no part of Mac Colla's purpose, and his claim to have set a new genre of realistic, genuine, Gaelic fiction in English dealing with the present-day problems of the Gaidhealtachd is to my mind sustainable. What surprises me is that so few English-writing Gaels, especially the poets who might be expected to show most subtlety and accuracy of linguistic conscience have built on this solid foundation. If a Gael must write in English, this is the way to do it, preserving the Gaelic constructions as much as possible in English.[83]

[82] Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1971), p. 31.
[83] Tom Scott, 'Novel That Marked a Watershed and the Man Who Wrote It', *Scots Independent*, February 1972, p. 10.

Robert Garioch, in a 1973 review of *Essays*... while praising Morrison's 'excellent, and perhaps unusual, idea to invite the author, whose works are under discussion, to speak for himself', has reservations about Scott's analysis of *The Albannach*, noting that he 'has something useful to say about Fionn Mac Colla's views so far as they agree with his, but through habit subsides into his own familiar message.'[84] This criticism will be considered here briefly.

There is no doubt that Mac Colla set out to shape a particular idiom in *The Albannach*, believing that he had indeed marked out a new genre of Scottish writing. This could not, however, be sustained over successive decades of the twentieth century, or be satisfactorily built upon by successive generations of Gaels in literature if we are to consider the main thrust of the novel, that of a 'realistic' representation of the Gaidhealtachd at a specific historical moment. This is the main paradox that a writer like Mac Colla, exercising a 'realist' approach to the Gaidhealtachd, faces. The differences that the characters notice between English and Gaelic place-names have been noted. In *The Albannach* such differences in language are examined, though the novel is not about exploiting artificial differences in language for political or cultural reasons but the importance of being able to regain a genuine identity which simply does not exist in 'idioms' alone. There are many messages in *The Albannach* to do with nationalism, creativity and the often indefinable relationship one has with place, but the ironic difficulty set forth in the text itself is its representation of the language in which it is *not* written. *The Albannach* is not about the differences between Gaelic and English – it represents the psychological schism through which these languages divide the society and the psyche of the Gael.

[84] Robert Garioch, 'Essays on Fionn MacColla', *Scottish International*, 6.10 (1973), 39.

That Scott is surprised that successive Gaels writing in English had not adopted this idiom is important. However, it is incorrect to assume that in doing so, a 'Gaelic construction', or a 'genuine idiom' would in some way be preserved, or that, even, the Gaelic window on to the world could somehow be glimpsed by the non-Gael. The idioms used in *The Albannach* may reflect a sort of 'Gaelicised' English that may have been used at some stage in the Gaidhealtachd, but it would be incorrect to assume that it is or was a genuine idiom spoken frequently anywhere in the Highlands if we consider its use in a literal context. From personal experience and conversations with people of older generations, it seems unlikely that this speech idiom was in use anywhere in the 1930s or the 1970s, and it is certainly not used today. That it could never be considered as a 'genuine' or 'realistic' form of speech leads one to assume that adopting it as a standard style through which a Gaelic-speaking character might express himself to an English-speaking readership is fraught with aesthetic difficulties as well as historical inaccuracy. What the language of *The Albannach* does provide us with is an opportunity to view a cross-over period in the cultural history of the Gaidhealtachd, when Gaelic was still in the process of being subsumed by English – a *brief* period in the socio-linguistic development of the area, which if English-writing Gaels were to employ today would be a reproduction, neither realistic nor authentic. Of this, it seems that Mac Colla was acutely aware. It is an example of his unique style. In any case, it must be noted that this particular idiom has different applications in *The Albannach*. The majority of the text is written in Standard English to be understood as Gaelic, with subtle nuances in narration, more obvious in speech or through the use of Gaelic words and phrases, which emphasise this. The position of Gaelic is established, for example, when Murdo ponders the use of the language in his village, noting that: 'The Gaelic was kept for worship and the

house of God, and it was only used at other times by the crofters and the men in Mexico's back room – and by an elder from the town now and then when the bottle was far down'.[85] The more subtle idioms to which Scott makes reference are at odds with the more obvious 'garbled' and 'mincing' English which is used when characters who attempt to speak English are berated by Murdo. This use of language was intended to highlight the cultural problems facing Gaelic at that particular historical moment and could not be reproduced in a more modern context:

> Dear Murdo, – we got your letter on this tuesday past and was glad to see you will be getting on allright with the lerning the thing ourselves never got. its necessary to have the lerning nowadays for a man will not get on wanting it. well theres nothing new with ourselves at the timebut last night Ruaray Alastars red cow was in the bog the back of Drumuane and your father was at her taking out. They had a bad job taking her out and the ground so wet with the rains weve been having and your father was not the better of it at all I am thinking.[86]

It is possible to see some similarity with Beckwith's *The Hills is Lonely* (1959), in this example of a Gaelic-speaker attempting to express themselves in formal, written English. Such expression is most effective when it is scrutinised in this particular written form, emphasising here a sincerity of attitude as presented by Mac Colla in this letter from a mother to her son. It can also be used for totally converse purposes, as in Beckwith's novel, when Morag McDugan's letter is mocked for its grammatical inaccuracies and double-entendres. Both are poignant examinations of Gaelic society and the attitudes towards it, through the way language is used in similar ways to elicit very different reactions. The more obvious uses of this particular Gaelic idiom, though, are the focus of much of the negative criticism directed at *The Albannach* in the national press upon its publication in the summer of 1932, and it is to these reviews we now turn.

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[85] Mac Colla, 1984, p.9.
[86] Mac Colla, 1984, p.104.

The social contexts, the political situation and the literary output in Scotland during the period are of major importance not only for a consideration of the Gaelic focus of *The Albannach*, and to Mac Colla's later work, but to any biographical study of Mac Colla himself. Each of the articles to be examined here will be dealt with chronologically. The intention is not simply to highlight praise or scorn for Mac Colla's work, but to present these previously unexplored articles within the context of what they can contribute to the understanding of the themes which motivated Mac Colla and the shifting attitudes which marked the times in which he lived.

'Scorn of the Gael'

The Albannach and Fionn Mac Colla elicited criticism and created controversy from the start. One of the earliest reviews of *The Albannach* was published in the *Daily Record and Mail* on 9 June 1932. Titled 'Scorn of the Gael: Highlander who trounces his own' the article is, on the whole, a fairly negative reaction from E. de. B. (Charles Edward De Bois).[87] The article begins by acknowledging the contemporary situation of the Highlander as a current issue, though it does little to appreciate the challenges to the literary stereotypes which Mac Colla was clearly confronting. 'There would seem to be a definite sadistic impulse in the Gael – an impulse towards self-flagellation' the article begins.[88] This opening statement alone delivers a subjective, generalised view of the Gael and most of the article treats the most powerful themes in *The Albannach* with the indifference of an outsider. The article is clearly presented to suggest a view from the outside looking in – though this, it could be argued, does enable it to raise the question of what exactly Mac Colla was doing with this presentation of a Highland life.

[87] Charles Edward De Bois was a Scottish Advocate. He was appointed Sherriff-Substitute of Ross, Cromarty and Sutherland at Stornoway, 30th October 1945.
[88] E.de.B, 'Scorn of the Gael: Highlander Who Trounces His Own', *Daily Record and Mail*, 9 June 1932, p. 3.

The article suggests two things: First, that Mac Colla's depiction of the Gaidhealtachd and its inhabitants is incorrect, suggesting that there were, and still are, those with clear prejudices about what the Gaidhealtachd was and is. Mac Colla, in writing *The Albannach*, sought to identify exactly what the reality of the situation in the Highlands was and what it could or should become. Evidently, this irked some of the earlier reviewers. Such reviewers should be forgiven for their objectification of the Highlands though – they appear to relate to the Gaidhealtachd not as a place of harsh modern realities but as the place presented in romantic literature and in the wider public realm as discussed above. The 'tourist image' of the Highlands and the realities of the Gaidhealtachd as presented in *The Albannach* are, in reality, mutually exclusive. The encroachment of one overshadows the status or immediate concerns of the other. The romantic, 'tourist image' of the Highlands presented in literature and continued later in film, postcards, railway posters and television programmes, on the surface gave the Scots something to be proud of. To react against this, to challenge it as Mac Colla and others did, was seen as an attack on the established image of Scotland. Despite Mac Colla's claim that it was not intended as an attack on any person or people *per se*, it *was* an attack on the image of the Highlander which had been adopted by a wider Scotland and acknowledged as such across the world. The tartan Highlander as a symbol of defiance – now the defiant Scot – is as recognisable across the world as any other national symbol and it is a flattering, rugged, romantic stereotype, but Mac Colla saw that it was untrue and therefore as unfair in equal measure as any negative portrayal could be. E. De. B. argues that *The Albannach* is no more than the most recent of attacks on Scotland and the Highlands: 'It has been evidenced in literary form in several recent novels, and now one is published to-day – *The Albannach*, by Fionn Mac Colla (John Heritage; 7s 6d net) –

which in the brutality of its criticism of the author's countrymen transcends all its predecessors.'[89] This statement implies that Mac Colla's rendering of the Gaidhealtachd and its inhabitants is deliberately untrue, or that it is at the very least exaggerated. To agree with this would form polarized standpoints – that Mac Colla's descriptions of life in the Highlands are as extreme and untrue in their realism as the tourist image is in its fabrication. Mac Colla himself, however, argued something which is overlooked in the *Daily Record and Mail* review; that it was simply a device which was employed to give the character of Murdo Anderson greater depth:

> The point of view, whose function is to impose unity on the work, is from inside the hero's perception throughout: we are supposed to apprehend the state of his consciousness at any moment by seeing things as he was seeing them. This is important as I have been accused, among other things, of seriously maintaining that a million people in Glasgow have pendant ears! If people and the world appear distorted it is meant to be an indication of the state of the observing soul. Normally, however, and in general, Murdo's vision of the world is that of the affirming or Yea-saying consciousness. For my part I have always seen people, particularly perhaps against the background of the natural scenery of Scotland, not as pleasing or unpleasing, but as *real*, and therefore wonderful – adventitious drops at noses irrespective. Has anyone bandy legs? – he can be assured of my hallelujah. Not because bandy legs are pleasing, but because *his* are *real*.[90]

What Mac Colla argues here does not detract from the 'realism' of the circumstances in the Highlands with regard to declining language and the imposition of cultural imperialism. What *The Albannach* does is to present and develop this world through the education of its central character. It is through this bildungsroman, that the Highlands and Gaelic culture and language are projected through Murdo Anderson's eyes, and though descriptions may appear hyperbolic at times, they do so precisely because they are interpreted through a protagonist who is a product of this culturally distorted environment. It is also true that Murdo's eyes are lifted somewhat by the end of the novel. It should be argued that his antagonism distorts his perception for

[89] E.de.B, 1932, p. 3.
[90] Mac Colla, 1984, vii.

most of the text and that this antagonism is fuelled by different and very complicated social factors. There is Murdo's innate sense of superiority which is fuelled by his dedication to learning and to freedom of the mind for one; though most importantly there is his outright anger at the people around him who initially represent (in his mind) the opposite of his own ideals. Mac Colla is focusing attention on a real place and on real social and cultural concerns through a protagonist who must learn the correct way to deal with these issues in a positive manner. To ignore the issues would be to simply gaze upon the landscape.

Secondly, the review raises the question of motivation. Both the realist camp and the tourist image, had, and have, their own motivations. It is familiar to reference *House with the Green Shutters* (1901) or *Gillespie* (1914) as 'anti-kailyard' novels, work generated by an opposition to a specific convention, a familiar fiction; equally *The Albannach* is a novel conceived in opposition to a convention, intended to oppose a familiar fiction. The image that books like *The Albannach* attempted to sweep aside was both enduring and flattering; despite the romance and nostalgia, it served an important purpose. It provided Scots a separate identity within the Union and it therefore played a significant part in the maintenance of a distinctive identity. It is tempting to view the situation as partisan, with one side pro-Scottish and the other pro-British, but it would be arrogant to accuse all those who oppose Mac Colla's particular viewpoint as 'anti-Scottish' or even unionist. What is clear is that there were differing opinions as to what 'Scotland' actually was.

The Gaidhealtachd has always been a significant, if overlooked factor in the shaping of Scotland. It developed a unique culture which posed a social and political problem for different governments and rulers at different periods spanning the history of the nation. Mac Colla was reacting against an enduring image, attempting to

dismantle restrictive stereotypes which not only represented Scotland but represented its constrained place within the union. To reclaim the Gaidhealtachd in this way and to show the realities – that it was suffering through the union, or that at the very least the union was doing nothing to alleviate the situation – was to challenge the authority of the status quo. A successful challenge would be a victory in redefining Scotland.

It is safe to assume that the mere thought of political radicals like Fionn Mac Colla and Hugh MacDiarmid assuming political status and scoring political victories during this period was anathema to some. There were those who did not wish to view the Gaidhealtachd in this 'realistic' manner, or who also simply lacked the information necessary to do so. As the heartland of the imagined Scotland, its place was, and remains, sacred to many. To radicalise the representation of the Gaidhealtachd, to portray it not only as not the established romantic ideal, but as a polar opposite where serious and radical political solutions were needed, was to challenge those views.

There is an important similarity to these representations: both sides projected upon the Gaidhealtachd their own political motives and realities. Both camps viewed the Gaidhealtachd as important and central to the creation of a 'Scotland', though they have different opinions as to its contemporary purpose. *The Albannach* was, therefore, not only a statement to shake the restrictive outside views of the Gaidhealtachd, but a threat from an opposing force which publicly sought political change through independence. The article concludes: 'There is no denying the strength of the writing, its vividness, and occasionally its beauty. But the whole tone of the book is unsympathetic. It will rouse those Gaels to fury who read it – which is perhaps Mr. Mac Colla's intention.' It was, perhaps, Mac Colla's intention – though

the ‘fury’ which he sought to rouse was for a different purpose than ‘Scorn of the Gael’ imagines.

Published the following day, a review in the Dundee based *Evening Telegraph*, by an anonymous reviewer named only as ‘a special correspondent’, closely follows the tone set by ‘Scorn of the Gael’. Listed as ‘Among the Latest Books’, is *The Albannach*, ‘…a savagely bitter story about Wester Ross that is shot through with a strange beauty.’[91] As with ‘Scorn of the Gael’ the characters are described as vile, though in this article the reviewer pays more attention to the cultural themes which Mac Colla brings to the fore and also highlights what he or she considers to be the greatest strength of Mac Colla’s early prose:

> The chief beauty lies in the descriptions of the West Highlands, which have perhaps not been bettered in any piece of modern Scottish writing. It is a place where ‘every prospect pleases and only man is vile’: the characters in *The Albannach* are for the most part very vile indeed. The author would have that a narrow religious creed has made them so, and the ‘Holy Willies’ of the place are trounced with the venom George Douglas Brown brought to bear on the Lowlander in *The House with the Green Shutters*, although not with Brown’s artistry. The central character – a young student of a literary bent, the son of a crofter – is brought up by a seceding elder, and through the youth’s hard, clear-sighted eyes we witness the ravages of bigotry. The youth escapes temporarily from it to Glasgow, but in rebelling against it sinks into dissipation – rather deeper than is becoming to a character the author later makes the instrument of the regeneration of the Highlands. This is the fatal flaw of ‘Albannach’. Murdo Anderson (accepting the position two-thirds through the story) seems destined to illustrate the defeatism of the Gael, his inability to regain his economic and cultural independence, but towards the end the author quite arbitrarily turns him into a symbolical figure and shows him piping the villagers back to a Celtic dreamland.[92]

This extract raises themes which are commonly examined when *The Albannach* is subject to review. Outside of the focus on the ‘vile’ caricatures, religion is a continual source of debate in criticism of Mac Colla’s works to this day, especially that of *And the Cock Crew*. *The Albannach*, however, despite its concentration on repressive

[91] ‘Among the Latest Books: The Albannach’, *The Evening Telegraph* (Dundee), 10 June 1932, p. 13.
[92] ‘Among the Latest Books’, 1932, p.13.

Calvinistic attitudes, does not make religious argument or dialectics its centrepiece. It explores, rather, a particular lingering aftermath of a metaphysical battle for Scotland against a culture which Mac Colla affirms was, in its purest form, incompatible in its essence to the strictest of incoming Presbyterian doctrines. 'Holy Willie's Prayer' then, is conjured in this piece – indeed, Mac Colla takes a similar view to Burns on such self-righteous psychology – but there is a sceptical tone with regard to Mac Colla's analysis of the 'chosen sample' in this article. And yet, Mac Colla's depiction of the stifling atmosphere which settled in these parts is not flippant or even comic and is not without careful examination on his own part or on Murdo's whose surmising of the situation is clear if fluctuating. Gaelic represents a freedom in *The Albannach* – whether it is freedom in reality is subjective, but that it is adopted by Murdo as such is the main point. If 'Holy Willies' are held to account, then rightly so. It is hardly fair of this reviewer to suggest that Murdo is presented as having 'clear-sighted' eyes through which the reader views the 'reality' of the Highlands. Murdo, very clearly, is not clear-sighted. Comparisons can be drawn with *Gillespie* (1914) by J. Macdougall Hay in this regard in that *The Albannach* is a presentation of a 'collapse' in the twentieth century; of nation, society, culture; it is witnessed through a character who embodies this collapse through a dislocation of the self. Gifford notes that this sense of the divided self as a representation of the Scottish 'duality' was displayed in the 'recurrent structuring and symbolism … to be found in most of the great fiction from Scott's *Waverley* (1814) to *Gillespie* in 1914.'[93] (p.233) Murdo Anderson's conflicted sense of self is a reference to these recurrent themes – themes which follow a clear tradition in Scottish literature up to this period. The characterisation of Murdo Anderson is a focus on the idea that such themes

[93] Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray, 2002, p.233.

represented a dislocation which had not subsided, and in the Gaelic world at, least, was gathering pace.

During a particularly hot and enduring church service, Murdo's thoughts are engaged by the dominating forces which influence people's lives and direct the courses of history:

> Life must have been good here in the old days. The folks were a lusty race in those old times, with a song never far from the lips and feet ever itching to be at the dancing. And the fine piping there must have been! But then the dark days came, with a new kind of religion that changed the old ways, stopped the song on the lip, and let the wind out of the pipes with a squealing of drones. Then the folks began going abroad till none were left but the old people and the bairns.[94]

Whether feet really were 'ever itching' or lips were blowing pipes in a golden age or not, it is a character's subjective viewpoint. There is a tradition in Scottish literature that holds that John Knox put a stop to the music and the dancing and the pipes, and with these, as Murdo Anderson would have it, went Gaelic. What *The Albannach* does is to re-focus this tradition of criticism as is seen in Burns, or in George Douglas Brown, and later in the work of Muriel Spark, Edwin Muir, Iain Crichton Smith, Sorley Maclean, Liz Lochhead and other Scottish writers, and place it in the contemporary location where the effects were still visible. For Gaelic-speaking areas the Reformation had drastic and noticeable effects on the culture shift. That is not to say, however, that the Reformation itself is the main concentration of *The Albannach*.

Mac Colla's views on the Reformation were fitting in with other writers of the period. Edwin Muir, in *Scott and Scotland* (1936), made the case that Scotland did not have a homogeneous language, adding that Scottish literature, therefore, was a

[94] Mac Colla, 1984, p.33.

'literature without a language' and that the Reformation and the Union of the Crowns and Parliaments all 'had a great deal to do with it.'[95]

Scott and Scotland appeared after Mac Colla had already begun work on *And the Cock Crew*, which examined the Reformation and its effects in Scotland, and it is clear that Muir and Mac Colla could share similarities in their opinions of how the Reformation had altered Scotland's situation, as both would have it, for the worse.

Muir does state that the Reformation meant Scotland's decline as a civilized nation, relating this to the prohibition of poetic drama.[96] So, although Mac Colla and Muir present differing evidence for their criticism of the Reformation, their conclusions are similar. They are in agreement that the Reformation destroyed Scotland: spiritually, as Mac Colla would have it, and culturally, as Muir also argues. By the mid-thirties then, the Reformation was being examined by writers and critics; it was seen as a historical event which led straight to the problems of contemporary Scotland. Culturally, politically, and psychologically, the writers were examining Scotland's potential, and the legacy of the Reformation on it. Muir argued the case that lack of a homogeneous language, directly led to a lack of creative output in post-Reformation Scotland, and that for Scotland to succeed creatively, the nation now needed to adopt English as the *lingua-franca*, though in the course of his essay, he more or less dismisses the contribution and potential of Gaelic. Mac Colla's argument, of course, was that the solution was a return to Gaelic. Muir writes in *Scott and Scotland* that it is not necessarily that Scotland lost its 'civilization' because it lost the Scots language. Yet this is precisely Mac Colla's argument with reference to Gaelic in *And the Cock Crew*.[97] Mac Colla presented the case that the language which was peculiarly Scottish, Gaelic, was indeed the true loss which precipitated

[95] Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (Edinburgh: 1936; rep. 1982), p.7.
[96] Muir, 1982, p.7.
[97] See Muir, 1982, p.43.

Scotland's final decline as a civilized nation. Muir acknowledges that, 'when a nation loses its language it loses an essential unifying element in its life…'[98] – a belief Mac Colla shared.

While his focus is on literature in Scotland, Muir contends that 'the chief requisite of literature is a homogenous language in which everything can be expressed that a people wishes to express.'[99] He notes that if Scotland has two of these languages, Gaelic and English, only English can work effectively in the future. He argues a far more pragmatic case for this analysis than Mac Colla does for Gaelic. 'Scotland can only create a national literature by writing in English', Muir concludes, something which earned him MacDiarmid's lasting enmity, and with which Mac Colla, clearly, did not agree.[100] The fact remains that Mac Colla wrote almost entirely in English, however. Muir presents Ireland as a case in point, where political nationalism and a cultural nationalism need not bear down upon a literary culture in the case of language. Paradoxically perhaps, Mac Colla demonstrates this in his novels.

What should be understood about *The Albannach*, and what is often overlooked, is that Mac Colla's depiction of the Calvinist realities in Wester Ross during this period are not outright criticisms without sympathy. His writing is empathetic to the situation as, frequently, Murdo questions his environment and its population, albeit with an immature and scolding eye. Even though Murdo reacts in a superior manner to the other Gaels around him, the abuse which he levels at them in his mind and under his tongue essentially highlights them as a poor people who, for the most part, appear uneducated and suffering, no less than Murdo himself. Murdo can and does leave – and when he eventually returns it takes him a long time before

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., p.111.
[100] Ibid.

he begins to empathise with his people outwardly, but that he does eventually give way to this impulse is a culmination of a series of events rather than a rash judgment on his own part or the author's. A particular scene, taken from the same section which is quoted above, depicts the transit of the people, from Murdo's village to the sermon at Achgarve, in John 'Lovat' Macdonald's van:

> Murdo nodded to Lovat and strutted round the end of the van. Seven or eight white faces stared at him in silence out of it. Black clothes and white, sour faces turning down at the corners of the mouths and glowering, glowering at him, with reproach in their eyes. He gave one look and then skipped round to the other side of the van and fairly doubled up with silent laughter so that the Bible fell out of his oxter on to the road. What in the world would come into his head when he looked inside, what but that here was a cartload of apes coming back from the hospital, glowering out reproachfully because of the glands they had left behind in a bottle! Take eight gibbering monkeys; remove their 'glands' – eight silent Seceders! That was how the contrast struck him between the outside and the inside of the van and he was still chuckling when he straightened his back after picking up the Bible.[101]

Such interpretations are fairly typical of Murdo's reaction to the people around him. He mocks them silently and to himself – to put it simply though, through Murdo's mocking of them they are portrayed as pitiful and homogenous. He regards them as in opposition to his own independence, though, stepping back from Murdo's perspective, it can be seen that they are at the mercy of a mockery which itself stems from Anderson's self-doubt and isolation. It is this which acts as the device through which they are portrayed – they are unresponsive and unwitting butts of Anderson's egoism. In this way, Mac Colla regards them empathetically. Religion is a theme, but it is not the main focus. Murdo does not react this way to all of the characters in *The Albannach*. In Iain Beag's workshop, the men that gather there represent the continuation of the Gaelic traditions and are men more of Murdo's mind, equally cynical of the stifling preoccupations and orders of the rest of the village. The focus is on a positive regeneration. The relationship Murdo has with Iain Beag typifies the

[101] Mac Colla, 1984, p.30.

sympathetic and touching undercurrent of empathy for the Gael which strains through the entire text until it is finally released when Murdo is able to expand this affection to the wider populace. A particularly important scene takes place during Murdo's final evening at the workshop before setting out for Glasgow the following morning:

> 'Now, Murdo, my friend, don't you be taking offence' says Iain, reaching for his hand and putting a folded paper that crinkled into it. 'You'll be going off to the city and forgetting us all; and you'll be wanting books, I'm sure, that you'll maybe not have the money for exactly handy at the time, so you won't be refusing a little gift from a friend that'll maybe let you get those books; and so you won't be forgetting us altogether.'
> 'Taing!' said Murdo, in a small voice, pushing the money into his pocket and blushing in the near dark. 'There's just a half-word more,' says Iain Beag's voice. 'You're going out on the start of your road, Murdo, and I know what that will be like to your kind of a lad, so I would just like you to be keeping in mind that there's a few of us here that can see further than the rest and the old type of stuff that's in you, and we're expecting you to go a long bit farther than most that went out before you or any that will be going out with you. I'm not sure myself that you're not the one biggest man that came out of this part ever. And it's the fine piper you'll be yet, I'm thinking,' he added. At this there was a lump in Murdo's throat and the tears came to his eyes; he was almost angry with Iain for it.[102]

Most of the people cannot match Murdo intellectually and none so academically – of this, he is well aware. Roderick Urquhart is the only one who comes close and he is subject to a sustained campaign of jealous competition from Murdo.

This is the important point which *The Albannach* makes and which the article in *The Evening Telegraph* fails to note. The problems in the Highlands during this period are highlighted by the fact that the Gaels and their culture were in this position in reality and not simply put there by Murdo Anderson or by Fionn Mac Colla. Their position was underrepresented and marginalised by the British government and overlooked in general by Scots. *The Albannach* was clearly intended to bring this situation to the fore as a contemporary novel. It can only be surmised that it was intended to elicit sympathy or support from a wider, English-speaking, public and to

[102] Mac Colla, 1984, p.75-76.

effect change; but to elicit sympathy does not make the Gael a victim – it is not an example of the 'defeatism of the Gael' nor does it represent his 'inability to regain his economic and cultural independence' – quite the opposite.

Murdo's attitude is at times admittedly obnoxious, but he is young. Rather than have it that the people simply exist only as vile caricatures, it is through Murdo's satirical patronisation of the various characters in *The Albannach* that sympathy for their situation is developed and his own inadequacies and self-doubts are revealed, and this is fundamental to his development as a character. It is true that, given the first-person focus of the novel, Murdo is developed at the expense of the development of the other characters in the book. Indeed, they cannot even begin to develop or become free until he does; they are totally reliant on him. The world Mac Colla creates in *The Albannach* is an inter-connected geometric design with Anderson at its centre – the final example that *The Albannach* is written from the perspective of a self-absorbed and self-important youth. Rather than being a simplistic 'fatal flaw', which detracts credibility from its message of spiritual well-being, as the author from *The Evening Telegraph* would have it, Murdo Anderson's experience helps to enact this representation – the character himself is a representation of Gaelic culture and its own psychological struggle. To give it a consciousness and therefore a voice, in a novel, it must become a character: Murdo Anderson. It must be self-absorbed. The review attacks Mac Colla for his naïve conclusion to *The Albannach*, with the focus on Anderson as a character who is used simply to relay a message: '…towards the end the author quite arbitrarily turns him into a symbolical figure and shows him piping the villagers back to a Celtic dreamland.'[103] This is, as we have seen, a simplistic attitude to both the character and the book and overlooks the progress and

[103] 'Among the Latest Books', 1932, p.13.

representation of Murdo as a traditional bard and torchbearer of Gaelic throughout his development.

It is from this perspective that the redemption of 'the Gael' is to be seen. In this stifling society, he is left to rebel as a solitary figure. His isolation propels his dislocation and this is manifested in his berating of those around him:

> Thin-skinned, that was the word the English had for it. He felt like an oversensitive Gulliver tied down by the Lilliputians. No, that was not all. He was fundamentally a coward. He made up his mind every time to stand up as befitted his years against this petty tyranny, and every time he failed to say a word, or he managed to get anything past his teeth it always sounded defiant and dignified and restrained, while he always collapsed miserably at the purple-faced blustering his feeble attempt at protest called forth. It was no good. He must realise that he was a hopeless coward … If the high hills had not been keeping the cool east winds from him he might have felt better, but here he was hemmed in and suffocated by the four walls of the house, and more particularly by the walls of his own skull – and in any case the east winds could not penetrate that. And there was a worse barrier than those, all the more effective in that it was intangible. You could break through a stone wall (if it was merely a stone wall and did not stand for something else, some authority you had not the will to break) but you could not break through this because it was of the consistency of jelly and simply gave to your hand and came back to its position the moment you took your hand away. It was composed of wills, such as his father's and his mother's and his teacher's, and of the opinions of a whole district, and of innumerable pointing fingers and whispering mouths and smug respectabilities. That was where Gulliver came in again, for through it all you felt the whole thing was petty and contemptible … For the moment he was able to convince himself of his superiority over the whole petty tribe, forever crawling about on their bellies and grubbing in the dirt, and the filth of their own making, under the very shadow of bens that would now be flaming red, now smiling in the face of a tender sky, now with the black gloom on their brows brooding over dead days and a gone race that you could not somehow believe had fathered these. He alone of them all had the grace to lift his eyes. The muscles tightened about his neck and wrists and the chest expanded at the thought.[104]

With the mention of George Douglas Brown's novel in 'Among the Latest Books', the evidence is clear that criticisms of religious interference, power and human self-righteousness and hypocrisy have a history and a precedent in Scottish writing. It is unfair to write that Mac Colla 'would have it' this way without, surely,

[104] Mac Colla, 1984, p.19–23.

applying the same caveat to Burns and Douglas Brown. The criticism of Calvinist doctrines is well documented in Scottish literature, but it is at this point that more relevant comparisons can be drawn between Mac Colla's work in *The Albannach* and Gaelic literary traditions which will add weight to the argument that his 'realistic' presentations of the Highlands were in line with the critical traditions of Gaelic poetry. As Donald Meek comments in his comprehensive study of Gaelic poetry during the Clearances and their aftermath, *Tuath Is Tighearna*:

> Various reasons can be offered for the loss of radical voice represented by the forgotten poets of the nineteenth century. First, their poetry was closely connected to particular events within that century, and it lost much of its immediate relevance after these events. In order to appreciate the poetry afresh, it is necessary to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, the social and historical contexts in which it originally flourished…Second, Highland people all too easily forgot the struggles of the nineteenth century, especially when they moved to the Lowlands or bettered themselves in other ways; the Lowland ceilidh circuit and the neo-romantic collectors administered heavy doses of cultural anaesthesia which served to blot out the hardships of the past. Third, the printing presses, generally located in the Lowlands, were inclined to publish the works of the more romantic school of poets whose view of the Highlands was that of a 'land of lost content', an escape-route from the pressures of contemporary readjustment to urban life. The strongest poets of the Clearances and the Land Agitation addressed themselves to the harsh realities of existence, and not to the construction of a fay and couthy view of the Highlands.[105]

The current chapter and, indeed, the bulk of this thesis follows the line which Meek draws here; namely that 'it is necessary to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, the social and historical contexts in which it originally flourished', with reference to Mac Colla's work. One aspect of this is Mac Colla's father's ancestry across generations, as we have seen. The inclusion of the newspaper articles written at the time of publication of *The Albannach* is also a key to this context as is the addressing of the 'harsh realities of existence' which was a tradition in radical Gaelic poetry long before Mac Colla came on the scene. This tradition shows that Mac Colla is in line

[105] Donald Meek, ed., *Tuagh is Tighearna/Tenants and Landlords* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 2005), p.15.

with the people of the area who, a generation earlier, had experienced first-hand what *The Albannach* was referring to. The existence of this tradition immediately contextualises Mac Colla's argument more deeply than those of the criticisms against him.

The purpose here though, is not to defend Mac Colla against such accusations. Admittedly, he makes a more serious accusation in *The Albannach*, than do Burns or Douglas Brown. Although religious debate is not at the centre of *The Albannach,* Calvinistic attitudes are credited with being fundamentally responsible for the stripping back of the Gaelic language from the people in the Gaidhealtachd. This is a much more far-reaching argument than the attack on individual hypocrisy and self-righteousness laid down by Burns or exposure of the vindictiveness and small-town poison in *The House with the Green Shutters*.

For Mac Colla to suggest malignity on such a scale would attract immediate criticism. Indeed, as has been shown, he was criticised for the negative portrayals in *The Albannach*, but it would be unfair to the reviewers examined here to overlook the positive aspects of their criticism. 'The chief beauty lies in the descriptions of the West Highlands, which have perhaps not been bettered in any piece of modern Scottish writing' the reviewer here concedes. And, despite the flaws which he or she perceives, '…it would be a pity if this…blinded people to the fact that in *Albannach* is to be found a passionate love of the country and its past, expressed in excellent prose, and that it contains some dozen most vividly etched portraits, and explores for the first time certain important aspects of Highland psychology.'[106]

The descriptions of landscape are powerful enough, and are often highlighted during even the negative criticisms of *The Albannach*. With his avowed proclamation

[106] 'Among the Latest Books', 1932, p.11.

that the book was designed to reject romantic images of the Highlands however, the inclusion of such stirring descriptions may seem ironic. It would be strange for a novelist to ignore or overlook the Highland landscape when writing about the Highlands, but Mac Colla's use of landscape is portentous. The hills are always flaming red or burning in the setting sun. The winds come to settle and clear the mind straight in off the sea. Yet their descriptions in this context, do not read like clichés or caricatures. Rather, they counterpoint social satire and replenish a sense of wonder.

The Albannach reclaims the right to bear grievance, while at the same time using that grievance to deliver a positive message for self-determination in the face of opposition from within. This is something which even the more negative early reviews of the book tend to exemplify. The poetry collected in *Tuath Is Tighearna* displays a tradition of Gaelic anger which Murdo Anderson embodies in *The Albannach*. As Meek says: 'Some of these poems are powerfully outspoken, with a deep undercurrent of anger, as if the poets, having already lost much, are prepared to lose all in a worthy cause…'[107] Does *The Albannach* reclaim the right to outspoken anger? Does it apportion blame or make the reader question whether it is wrong to accuse? To move on, a process of reconciliation must take place. From the position of *The Albannach*, this had never happened. In the negative critical reactions to *The Albannach*, it is imagined as an aspect of parochial nationalism thriving on grievance. In the eye of a hostile critic, such grievance arises from emotionalism and emotionalism detracts from rational debate and can therefore be discounted. This article clearly wishes to engage in this argument, accusing Mac Colla of propaganda and emotionalism:

> The author's abuse of everything that does not come out of the Gaelic past savours of revivalist emotionalism from first to last. Mac Colla substitutes for

[107] Meek, 1995, p.16.

> the revivalist's denunciation of the sins of the world invective against the Sassenach, and instead of the Kingdom of God preaches the attractions of the Celtic Dreamland – emotionalism in each case runs riot. It is the subjective attitude to what is Celtic, combined with its picture of the Seceders, that will annoy many readers. It mars the book artistically, for the story falls between two stools, between the private history of Murdo Anderson, John the Elder's son, and the history of Murdo Anderson, Celtic propagandist and revivalist.[108]

Meek makes it clear that the poetry from the period of the Land Agitation and the Clearances does not just represent outspoken anger. Like the themes in *The Albannach*, the poems of the Clearances are full of anger, but: '… others are sorrowful and reflective; others again are celebratory, and a few are delightfully pawky and humorous. Occasionally, the moods are mixed in a heady cocktail of conflicting emotions…alongside the stronger specimens; there are poems which are gentle and remarkably resigned to hard circumstances.'[109] This shows a wide spectrum of very real human emotion. To label it 'revivalist emotionalism' would be to ignore the human history which, during the 1930s, was still a living memory or even actively felt present and experienced. To label justified anger as grievance is essentially the same as labelling the sorrowful, reflective, celebratory and humorous poetry written during the Clearances as 'the attractions of a Celtic dreamland'.

Following the geometric Celtic design analogy which connected Murdo Anderson to the world in *The Albannach,* the argument here begins to circle in on itself once more. The author of 'Among the Latest Books' highlights Mac Colla's subjective attitude to what is Celtic, which returns the thread to the earlier focus on what the Highlands represent in terms of its relationship with Scotland, confirming that it does indeed play a defining role which Mac Colla recognised as being crucial for political and cultural battles. Those concerned with Scotland have to comprehend the Highlands – some will choose it for Gaelic and traditions, but in whatever aspects,

[108] 'Among the Latest Books', 1932, p.11.
[109] Meek, 1995, p.16.

it is an essential component of Scotland's national identity. This draws back to the earlier statement made by Tom Scott, that Murdo represents Scotland and all Celtic people. The reviewer in this article criticises the fact that *The Albannach* is about Gaelic and Scotland. The question is whether the emphasis on Gaelic relegates the rest of Scotland to alien status, or somehow 'less Scottish' than the Gaidhealtachd. John MacInnes has explored this question in his essay 'The Gaelic Perception of the Lowlands', concluding that:

> The sense of integrity of the kingdom of Scotland…and a perception of the Lowlands as part of that integrated whole emerges time and time again in Gaelic tradition…
>
> The Gaelic perception of the Lowlands is in essential agreement with that of the medieval Scots writers who regard the Gaels of their time as "contemporary ancestors", people who preserve the language and culture which were once shared by us all. But from the Gaelic point of view, we the Gaels are the disinherited, the dispossessed.[110]

This resonates with Mac Colla's own opinion, as an unpublished note on the nature of the Gaelic language in Scotland reveals: 'It is the Scottish language…Only [the] Lowlanders have to go farther back than Highlanders before they come to Gaelic-speaking ancestors.'[111]

The Albannach is about Gaelic and the Gaels' relationship *with* Scotland. The fact that it is called *The Albannach* and not The Scotsman, says everything to this effect. It is about the Highlands and Gaelic in the Highlands; it is about the contemporary culture of the Highlands; it is about what is *now* the Gaidhealtachd. Murdo does not pipe the people of Glasgow into a 'Celtic dreamland'. He reinstates the spiritual and cultural importance of culture in its diminishing heartland. Murdo does not represent Scotland, but his story is an *element* of Scotland's story. As a nation with three current indigenous languages, Scotland needs more than one

[110] John MacInnes, *Duthchas nan Gaidheal* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006) pp. 34-47.
[111] NLS dep 239/12/f.

embodiment and nowhere does Mac Colla suggest that any one element of Scotland is less relevant to the nation's history than another. Chris Guthrie, for example, embodies elements of an ancient Scots and a changing Scotland. Murdo Anderson too, embodies a Scotland, albeit one that is even more ancient, that of Alba.

'Scorn of the Gael' from the *Daily Record and Mail*, and the article from *The Evening Telegraph* are fairly negative reviews overall – mostly regarding the strength and force of manner with which Mac Colla puts forward a case for a Scotland with Gaelic roots and that these roots have contemporary political relevance. However, negative as they are, in this respect they accurately reflect Mac Colla's political and cultural priorities.

'Pig's Eyes in Alba'

Another article however, 'Pig's Eyes in Alba', published in the *Evening Times*, on 16 June 1932, by the friend of Neil Gunn, John MacNair Reid, is more difficult to categorize. It presents *The Albannach* as a reflection of Gaelic doom. It ignores the cultural re-engagement, which Mac Colla makes the symbol of the importance of political radicalism in Scotland, and it even mistakenly criticises plot lines which do not occur. It is difficult to assign to this review any of the characteristics which can shed light on the contexts behind *The Albannach*. Its sole purpose appears to be a thinly-veiled assault on Mac Colla's intentions for writing the book. With this, it could be argued that 'Pig's Eyes in Alba' is in fact an important article of a different kind. The article acknowledges Mac Colla's undoubted abilities as a writer, but this lone compliment is delivered in a less than complimentary fashion:

> One would hesitate to take so sorely such a vindictive and malevolent attack on the West Highlander, and on Scotland generally, were not the author obviously endowed with considerable literary gifts. He presents the superiority

> that is only [text unreadable] in youth and unpardonable when it is given such absurd liberties.[112]

Given the arguments which have already been presented here in defence of Mac Colla's position on the Gaidhealtachd, it seems unnecessary to comment on this allegation further. It should be noted, however, that MacNair Reid's article does continue with a criticism of the language used in *The Albannach*:

> The writing is affected by the Gaelic idiom, which is so irritatingly pronounced as to give the effect of a bad translation. If it is used as propaganda it is at the expense of English, and presumably it is a novel in English we are getting. The style is hiccoughing with 'the pig's eyes of him' 'the nose of him' everywhere. Occasionally, however, it rises free, and in rich English has a fine verse and finish.[113]

The critic begrudges having to suffer the 'Gaelic idiom' and a 'realistic' Highland subject matter. Indeed, 'Pig's Eyes in Alba' appears determined to raise this as an issue from the outset:

> Murdo Anderson is the son of a West Highland couple who are at home in 'The Gaelic' and in whose lives the agony of a debased Puritanism is long drawn out. Murdo is scolded and abused by his father and mother; but their upbraiding is nothing compared to the hate and venom that reside in their son's dark, selfish soul.[114]

MacNair Reid either misunderstands, has not properly read, or deliberately distorts sections of the text in this article, most notably when he writes: 'During [Murdo's] second stay in Glasgow he has a drinking bout and in another, gets entangled with a stray woman, and later on rapes his elderly landlady.'[115] This travesty affords us the opportunity to discuss one of Mac Colla's greatest strengths in the book. There are sections of *The Albannach* when Mac Colla's descriptions of Murdo's confused state of mind are passionately vivid and depicted in a stream of consciousness which is

[112] John MacNair Reid, 'Pig's Eyes in Alba', *Evening Times*, 16 June 1932, p.2.
[113] MacNair-Reid, 1932, p.2.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.

used to portray, firstly, Murdo's confused juxtaposition of shame and pride after drunkenly losing his virginity to a stranger, and then his terrifying, panic-ridden sweaty wanderings after contracting a venereal infection as a result. This is best demonstrated as Murdo attends a lecture and the professor's words are interrupted by extracts from Leviticus 13 in Gaelic:

> Going up the steep stone stairs they were all around him, pressing on him. They whispered in his ear, they breathed on his neck, laughed loudly up the leg of his trousers. If one of them touched him he shrank back in terror. Contamination! He wanted to run, to leap up the stairs, three to a stride. He began to choke and suffocate. He opened his mouth. A man above his head turned round and coughed hot stinking breath into it … You will remember that I had occasion to mention this point last day and that I illustrated it by an Liobhar air am bheil a'phlaigh reubar 'aodach agus glaodhaidh e, Neoghlan, neoghlan. Ré nan uile laithean a bhitheas a'plaigh air bithidh e salach tha e neoghlan, which sometimes takes a different form gabhaidh e cómhnuidh 'na aonar somewhat surprising an taobh a muigh de'n champ bithidh 'ionad-táimh* consider the other manifestations of the same is duine lobhrach e BUT, and here that e neoghlan, gairmidh an sagart e neoghlan gu h-iomlan which illustrates my tha a' phlaigh 'na cheann the oftener this occurs the imichibh, tha sibh neoghlan, tha sibh neoghlan comes into operation tha sibh neoghlan, tha sibh neoghlan –ing to another side of the is duine lobhrach e, tha e neoghlan find that imichibh, imichibh, tha sibh neoghlan…
> *Leviticus XIII. 45, 46, etc.[116]

The entire episode, from the contraction to the cure, is played with an acknowledgement that Murdo is shaming his devoutly religious heritage – his personal and private torment reel at him and the cries of neoghlan (unclean) compound an already fracturing personality. That the passage from Leviticus is in Gaelic is the manifestation of this deep and personal psychological shame, (tha a' phlaigh 'na cheann / the plague is in his head) though it takes on a very physical manifestation too, such as when he makes his way to the doctor's:

> When he got to the street he had to take the coat lapels in his two hands and pull himself along. Would his knees hold him up till he got that length? Only ten yards more now. He pulled himself up the steps and leant against the wall, fear gripping him at the throat, gulping air. When he got into the dark gullet of a lobby he would have turned and run, but he had not the strength. Then

[116] Mac Colla, 1984, pp.195-6.

> the man slammed the door behind him and he was caught, trapped, his retreat cut off. What could he say? What mistake could he pretend to have made in order to get out again without speaking about it, about it about IT, to another person? His brains began to swell up inside his head. Another minute and his skull would fly in two. A hand was gripping him firmly by the shoulder.
>
> "Well, my boy, been careless again, have you?"[117]

The main point of the inclusion of this section on Murdo's contraction of a sexually transmitted infection is to highlight the fact that Mac Colla never explicitly writes that this has happened. It is never acknowledged that this has happened because Murdo never dares to acknowledge it through his shame. It is implied – his state of mind is confused and therefore the style becomes stressed and abstract. It is necessary to highlight this in order to counter MacNair Reid's statement above that Murdo rapes his elderly landlady. As has already been demonstrated, Murdo does contract an infection through having sex with a stranger, but this encounter leads to the passage now in question which takes place slightly earlier than Murdo's manic episode:

> He had not had any private code of morals to break. No, he had nothing but his curiosity to satisfy. But the others, they had a code – and he had broken it. They had a code, a stout matronly person with a dirty mind, and he had raped her – and perhaps he had been upset not so much at the act itself as at the feeling that she had liked it; she had enjoyed being raped, this respectable person. His people and all their people before them, not to mention all the people around them, had erected a great edifice of beliefs and attitudes, of taboos and silences – he himself had been brought up within it – and he had, at one blow, thrown it down. Any young man might be forgiven a little momentary terror at such an act, even if it was only at the terrible cloud of dust he had raised. There were things, right enough in themselves, that a young man could not do, himself and unaided, without a momentary tremor. One of these was to strike an old man in the face, and that was what he had done. He had given a certain reverend old patriarch, one John Knox, a bloody dunt on the nose. And although the old cod-fish had needed it badly, inverted libertine that he was, it was but natural that a sensitive young man should be a little upset at seeing the blood trickling down among the white hairs of his beard – he would have to wash that before he went to bed with the child that was his wife, and she scarcely a woman yet, the villain![118]

[117] Mac Colla, 1984, p.200.
[118] Mac Colla, 1984, pp.191-2.

As is plain here, Murdo no more rapes his elderly landlady than he literally punches John Knox in the face. What MacNair Reid somehow staggeringly refuses to acknowledge, or fails to realise, is that the rape is a metaphorical rape of the rigid 'morality' of Murdo's background and place. Dunting John Knox on the nose clearly establishes Murdo's initial curiosity as an act of personal liberation through social and sexual rebellion. This firmly establishes the experiences that *The Albannach* is advocating; not drunkenness or promiscuity, but impulse and experience. This is Anderson saying 'Yea' to the 'Nay' of not only his own society in the Gaidhealtachd, but to the repression and rigid morality of society everywhere. Despite his later trauma and drink-fuelled regrets, Murdo initially embraces his freedom and understands immediately the importance of *experience*.

But all this, rather tentatively, refers back to the previous chapter and the relationships between the various writers in Scotland during the 1930s and what, if any, reasons can be found to explain MacNair Reid's open hostility to the book which is described with fervent detail in the closing paragraph of 'Pig's Eyes in Alba':

> Nowhere nourished with the milk of human kindness, this novel depicts the West Highland Gael as the very scum of the earth, and Murdo, whether the author intended it or no, is the most contemptible and insufferable of the lot. The Gael asks himself which of the two philosophical tags to set it under. 'Save us from our friends' or 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' But Mr Fionn Mac Colla hardly deserves the latter, and we leave him with the former, assured that his book, however passionately conceived, can never do anything to aid the fair name of Alba.[119]

This article has never been examined in this context, but doing so reveals so much about how Mac Colla's work was misrepresented from the outset.

In 1982, Ruth McQuillan published a review of Francis Hart and J.B. Pick's biography of Neil Gunn, *A Highland Life,* in *Lines Review* Number 80. She had

[119] MacNair Reid, 1932, p.2.

already assisted John Herdman and Mary Macdonald in editing Mac Colla's posthumous novel *The Ministers* by this time, so it is not surprising that she finds the relationship between MacDiarmid, Gunn and Mac Colla interesting:

> It was brave of an American and an Englishman (Hart and Pick) to venture hand in hand into the minefield of Scottish politics. They are interesting also when they tackle the misunderstanding between Neil Gunn and Fionn Mac Colla (each acclaimed as the novelist of the Highlands, as if there could not be several). What concerns the writers […] is the lasting damage this episode did to the relationship between Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid, and they blame Compton Mackenzie for much of the trouble. More specifically they touch on old and sore grievances…On 25 June 1932, MacDiarmid wrote in the *Free Man* a glowing account of Mac Colla's work. When MacDiarmid paid tribute to a young writer only hyperbole would do – it was part of the breath and greatness of the man. Unfortunately on this occasion some incautious comparisons were made, as '*The Albannach* … is a far stronger novel simply as a novel than … Neil Gunn's *Morning Tide*.' Mac Colla saw Gunn before he saw the *Free Man* and, to the end of his life, used to describe how Gunn moved then with the spring-heeled walk of an angry man.[120]

The incident described above is detailed in the previous chapter, but the article in question, MacDiarmid's 'At the Sign of the Thistle', which appeared in the *Free Man* on June 25, 1932, shall be examined here to examine the context behind MacNair Reid's article. McQuillan is actually fairly restrained when she details the hyperbole with which MacDiarmid praises *The Albannach*. He was heavily involved in discussions to get the novel published, and upon his success, he exclaims: 'That I was finally able to secure its publication, I regard as one of my most unquestionable services to the Scottish Movement.'[121] MacDiarmid continues that, 'It is a document of first-class importance in the development of the whole Scottish Renaissance Movement, and will outrage the susceptibilities of all who have conventional ideas of Gaeldom, in the same way that the hard satirical writings of the ancient Gaelic bards outrage those who regard Gaelic literature as synonymous with the silly soft

[120] Ruth McQuillan, '*Neil Gunn: A Highland Life*' in *Lines Review*, 80 (1982), 21-24 (p.21).
[121] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'At the Sign of the Thistle', *The Free Man*, 25 June 1932, p. 4.

"spiritualties" of the Celtic Twilight period.'[122] These 'conventional ideas of Gaeldom' are the ideas which appear to have blighted the earlier reviews which have been discussed in this chapter. It is unclear whether what MacDiarmid wrote in 'At the Sign of the Thistle' was a response to these articles, but what is clear is that he regarded criticism of their type as wholly demonstrative of the elements within the 'Scottish Movement' which could not, or would not, embrace the radicalism in Gaelic that Mac Colla was advocating. The article condemns the lack of progress in terms of Scottish nationalism and cultural movements when he praises Mac Colla's intellectual gifts:

> MacColla has a knowledge of the Gaelic of a most uncommon range and particularity, and is in a position to make – and does make – savage fun of Gaelic teaching in Scottish Universities, and the superficial pretence of An Comun Gaidhealach and like bodies. Scotland is far from ripe yet for so radical a genius…He speedily found that most of those engaged within that movement had no more than vague woolly ideas, and were relatively brainless and bitterly opposed to brains when they encountered them. He was crushed by a horde of his intellectual inferiors … whether the actual appearance of his book will restimulate him and enable him to 'deliver his goods' in the teeth of complacent mediocrity and stupid misunderstanding remains to be seen. His work abounds in exact analysis of the most devastating description – in satirical passages of a bitterness that has no equal save in some of the old Gaelic Bards.[123]

Here then, is MacDiarmid's contemporary reply to the critics of Mac Colla's work – *The Albannach* is too real, too accurate in its summation of the problems of Gaelic dislocation and the relevance this has to a politically independent and unified Scotland that it flies in the face of conventional attitudes, or the 'tourist image' of the Highlands. MacDiarmid acknowledges that Mac Colla writes in the tradition of the Gaelic Bards, as has been developed here with reference to Meek's compilation, *Tuagh is Tighearna*. This surely confirms that Mac Colla too was aware of this and, in fact, that the central character Murdo Anderson is a Bard himself, suggests that this

[122] MacDiarmid, 1932, p.4.
[123] Ibid.

element of *The Albannach* is well thought-through and deliberate; it is quite some distance from MacNair Reid's questioning of whether or not Mac Colla was ever in control of the direction of the book in any case.

Writing to MacDiarmid two weeks after the publication of 'At the Sign of the Thistle', Gunn takes issue with MacDiarmid's 'hordes of intellectual inferiors':

> Praise or abuse may not matter a damn, but at least recognise the facts. The only what might be called adverse review that MacColla's received, to my knowledge, appeared over Macnair Reid's initials in *The Evening Times*. When I ran into Reid at Bannockburn he told me that a letter had been addressed by your – or MacColla's – publishers to his firm abusing Reid in a manner so scurrilous that the management had to take appropriate action. For any praise or abuse I don't give a damn, but I must admit that when Reid told me that, I felt pretty mad…[124]

It is difficult to comment on MacDiarmid's praise for Mac Colla's book without considering the weight that MacDiarmid appears to place on its importance to the Scottish Movement. That it is Gaelic themed at any rate, clearly sparked MacDiarmid to attempt to make political capital on its relevance, that this was a genuine Gaelic voice which could join the political movement, but the seriously bitter and jealous spats which MacDiarmid is coercing in the comments above go some way to removing the pretence of objective criticism. To refer to those who disagree with the premise of the book, as 'sap-heads' is inflammatory; this is what was clearly intended. MacDiarmid is placing the book at the centre of an argument on the future political direction of the country in an attempt to lift Mac Colla's book out of the critics' pages and onto the wider political debate. In so doing, he is placing an even greater relevance upon it. This relevance is clearly what authors like Gunn objected to.

The inclusion of MacNair Reid's article in this section is not to discredit him – it serves simply to reinforce the issue which has been a prevalent theme throughout

[124] Gunn in Pick, 1987, pp. 19-20.

this chapter and what MacDiarmid does articulate here. Scotland had difficult choices to make during this period, both politically and culturally – the stakes were high and the divisions were deep. The nationalist cause was yet in its infancy, and those who supported Scottish independence were coming at the issue from different sides. Though more will be made of the relationships between the men and women who embodied these movements in the following chapter, it should be noted that there is justification to claim that Mac Colla suffered from this sort of argument taking place over his work. This is something to which Mac Colla was sensitive:

> I won't deny that my sensations on reading this ['At the Sign of the Thistle'] were of great self-satisfaction, written as it was by one of the few critics in Scotland at the time to whose judgement I attached the slightest value. But it seemed to me unfair – and to lay me open to a charge of unfairness – in a number of instances.[125]

Though there is little doubt that MacDiarmid was indeed using Mac Colla in a point-scoring exercise, there is nothing whatsoever to suggest that he was not also completely genuine in his sentiments in 'At the Sign of the Thistle'. There is something to consider though, in MacDiarmid's assertion that Mac Colla's career was being deliberately obstructed by Gunn's camp. In the same letter that has been discussed above, Gunn signs off: '…Don't, my dear fellow, come it over with me the inferior horde standing between MacColla – or anyone else – and his destiny. C'est tout...'[126]

[125] NLS Dep. 265/33.
[126] Gunn in Pick, 1987, pp.19-20.

'The Worst of the Highlands'

The reviews which have been examined above serve to indicate historical and socio-political contexts which surrounded Mac Colla and his work. Not all of the early reviews for *The Albannach* were negative, however. The wildly differing opinions on the book's importance are significant in highlighting not only the separate literary camps in Scotland and their public spats with each other, but also the differing political opinions which were tightly wound with Scottish cultural representations and identity in the 1930s. There were, of course, reviews like the ones above which focused on what seem to have been the most troubling aspect of the book, namely, subject matter and language. As Ian S. Munro, later the biographer of Lewis Grassic Gibbon[127] wrote in *The Bulletin* under the headline 'The Worst of the Highlands':

> The intellectual Scot is apt to be a savage animal, and in THE ALBANNACH … Mr Fionn Mac Colla is savage enough for any Scot. The book appears to be meant as a Highland contribution to a possible Scots literary renaissance, and I can claim some credit for having read it to the end (except for the increasing thickets of Gaelic) under this belief in its aim … As a novel 'The Albannach' is an intolerably bad book … In so far as the book arouses the disgust aroused by a dirty Highland house, it may claim a certain local flavour, and that is the extent of its artistic achievement.[128]

As with the previous articles, the fact that the book has a Gaelic focus seems to trouble Munro, though there is nothing in the article which is offered to sustain this view. The subject matter too irks him: 'It is arguable that the society of the Western Isles is as decayed as a dead fish, and that the Highlandman is at his worst when he emerges from the kirk, but it takes some sense of humanity to make these propositions interesting to a novel reader.'[129] Mac Colla's focus then, does not seem to be a focus which attracted all readers. As has been argued throughout this chapter with corroboration from Meek and MacDiarmid, Mac Colla's portrayal of the

[127] Ian S. Munro, *Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1968).
[128] Ian S. Munro, 'The Worst of the Highlands', *The Bulletin*, 30 June 1932, p. 18.
[129] Ibid.

Gaidhealtachd was groundbreaking; it reclaimed radicalism and a sense of identity that highlighted a division as surely as did the presentation of it as politically vital to Scotland's future. The first paragraph from this short review criticises the very inclusion of Gaelic in *The Albannach* and questions the interest of a novel which focuses on the realistic portrayal of the Highlands, which was precisely Mac Colla's purpose in writing the book. The attitude expressed suggests that the Highlands are only relevant or interesting to 'novel readers' when they are explored in the conventional manner. There is little the article has to say other than that the book is irrelevant and Gaelic.

The reviews here are critically chosen to highlight the politics of the 1930s – the fact that there are subversive political debates taking place over a novel should give the contemporary reader pause for thought. Overall, however, the reviews for Mac Colla's first book were very positive and many highlighted the very points he was trying to make. Interestingly enough, the most positive early reviews appeared in London-based publications. An anonymous reviewer in *The Times* writes that:

> Most good plots are fairly old, and the imaginative grip of the theme under the subject, the poisoning of the old Highland culture, and the possibility of its real rebirth, is so intense and sincere, and the book, though weakened in places by over-violence, has so keen and vivid a sense of both beauty and ugliness, has so much grasp of values in handling detail, that Mr MacColla seems likely to take a high place in the lively generation of Scottish novelists that is growing up since the war. He has certainly produced a first novel that is not only close to observed harsh fact and yet so querulous, but is a piece of real creative writing that rises often to unusual beauty.[130]

In stark opposition to the negative criticism discussed above, the more positive reviews appear extremely keen to highlight Mac Colla's subject matter and his use of language. A review from *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1932 comments on Mac Colla's attempts to move away from the conventional attitudes which prevail when

[130] 'New Novel', *The Times*, 24 June 1932, p.14.

dealing with the Gaidhealtachd; 'For a first novel to handle a plot whose action is simply the bare bones of this worn theme and do so without the querulous inverted sentimentality to which we are accustomed is itself an achievement.'[131]

What is notable in the positive reviews of *The Albannach*, is that they tend to acknowledge Mac Colla's aims. The positive reviews are able to look past the 'Gaelic' words, embrace their inclusion and comment on the cultural importance of Mac Colla's themes. Edwin Muir in *The Modern Scot* writes that: 'His (Mac Colla's) observation of character and physiognomy is extraordinarily subtle' and that he has a 'rare ability to create characters completely'. What reviewers like John MacNair Reid et al find so unappealing about *The Albannach*, reviewers like Edwin Muir champion:

> *The Albannach* is a brilliant performance and should receive an unequivocal welcome for a country not remarkable for brilliant performances in literature. It contains a whole gallery of portraits of an almost startling lifelikeness. The father and mother of Murdo, the hero, are the best in that gallery, but the Highland missionary with his unction, his gluttony and his lecherous little eyes is almost as good.…But the passage that shows best the author's extraordinary power and sincerity of imagination is the one describing his hero's half-mad terror in Glasgow after discovering that he was physically tainted. The description of Murdo's state of mind is the work of a writer of first-rate powers. Those powers are unquestionably there, they make the reading of this book an exciting experience …[132]

In *The Daily Mail*, Compton Mackenzie noted the importance of Mac Colla's book, noting that it '… offers a richer promise of something in the future than any novel I have read about Scotland during the last decade …'[133]

The articles in question, then, show a broad spectrum of opinion and help to illuminate not only reactions to Mac Colla's book, but also the contexts regarding Scottish politics and culture which were relevant in the 1930s, and are still relevant

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[131] Agnes Mackenzie, '*The Albannach* by Fionn MacColla', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 1587 (1932), p. 478
[132] Muir, *The Modern Scot*, 1932.
[133] Compton Mackenzie, 'Review of *The Albannach*', *The Daily Mail*, 1932; in Mac Colla, Fionn, *And the Cock Crew* (Edinburgh: MacLellan, 1945).

today. They also confirm that nationalism in Scotland in the years before the formation of the Scottish National Party combined politics with art and culture to argue the case for political independence in radical and intellectual terms. An article which discusses the situation very well was published in *The Scots Magazine* in July of 1932, most likely by Dr. J.B. Salmond, the editor at the time. The review focuses very much on the contemporary themes of the novel, and highlights the contemporary themes in the Gaidhealtachd, where: '… the immediate heritage of a race is so powerful that the old one means little or nothing.' This does not, however, mean that *The Albannach* is unconcerned with heritage or history, quite the contrary, as we have seen. Instead, this review helps to confirm the notions put forward here. *The Albannach* is focused on one man – his life and his culture do not represent Scotland in its totality. The focus is on Murdo Anderson and on the Gael: 'This clever book shows one thing – that if the Gael is losing out in his own country, then the Gael is essentially to blame, and his regeneration must come from himself. Otherwise, like Murdo, he can only go back, and undoubtedly the last stage of that man shall be worse than the first. The trouble with this Gael is that he has never been too sure of what was his heritage, or what was his destiny.'[134] *The Albannach* was intended as a step forward. Given the level of fierce debate which surrounded its initial publication, both positive and negative, it certainly drew attention to the issues which Gaelic was facing, insisting throughout that self-determination was the key to self-improvement.

The final review to be looked at here was published in 1932 after *The Albannach*'s initial publication, and discusses the furore which the book started. Published in the nationalist orientated *The Scots Independent*, by N.K. Wells in July

[134] J.B. Salmond, *The Scots Magazine*, 17.4 (1932), 318-20, (p.319-20).

of 1932, the review acknowledges that what Mac Colla has presented to the public in *The Albannach* is difficult to acknowledge, but nevertheless, it must be so:

> Reviewers are finding fault with the book for its realism, which is, as realism must be, cruel. It is true that the author has put his fingers to his nose at the generation that went before him repressed and oppressed, as all older generations do. Well, we have all done that in our time, and we have all paid for it, and so, no doubt will he. But it has got to be done, and the picture is necessarily painful, as the thing itself is. But it is wrong to call it sadism. It is love, that peculiar Scots variety, that chastens with whips and scorpions because it cannot bear to behold the degradation of the beloved […] And it is by a well-known Scottish Nationalist. It definitely marks another step forward in our Scottish renaissance.[135]

Mac Colla rejected stereotypes of Gaelic 'defeatism' as portrayed in Salmond's article. A final example of this attitude, that *The Albannach* was written to oppose, can be found in William Power's *Literature and Oatmeal* (1935): 'The blame for the extraordinary neglect of Scotland's history and culture rests with the Scots Gaels themselves. They failed to preserve and cultivate the national heritage of which they were the natural custodians.'[136] While this acknowledges Gaelic as a 'national heritage', *The Albannach* combined cultural and political statement, taking issue with the attitude that Power demonstrates. This chapter has focused attention on the importance of Mac Colla's themes by presenting the attitudes and arguments of those who opposed him. *The Albannach* presents the cultural and social situation in the Highlands as being responsible for the decline of the 'national heritage', and the direct result of a lack of political control. For Power, a future leader of the SNP, to profess these attitudes highlights the conflict with regard to not only the direction, but also the history, of Scottish culture and society in the nationalist movement which Mac Colla's writing polarises. These are conflicts with which he was to become increasingly involved when he began writing for *The Free Man* in 1933.

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[135] N.K. Wells, 'Books of Scottish Interest', *The Scots Independent*, July 1932, p. 141.
[136] William Power, *Literature and Oatmeal*: *What Literature has meant to Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1935) p. 187.

Chapter 3: *The Free Man*

The Free Man was a periodical magazine, running from 1932 to 1934, with a brief resurgence in the 1940s. Edited by Robin Black and Hugh MacDiarmid, and financed by Dr Stanley Robertson, it was a nationalist magazine with an internationalist agenda. From the editorial of its first edition:

> *The Free Man* by its title indicates its main purpose. We are living in an age when mass education, mass propaganda, and mass control threaten to destroy the possessions of personality and to prevent the exercise of that individual freedom without which no civilisation has any real value … we wish to deal not only with all the cultural aspects of life in Scotland, but also to relate these to the world as a whole … Always in the background, however, must be our own national interests, for only a virile nationalism can create and maintain a vital internationalism.[1]

After the publication of *The Albannach*, between 1932 and 1933 Fionn Mac Colla wrote a number of articles for *The Free Man* which mark the development of a more forceful agenda in his writing. By the early 1930s, he was no stranger to the Scottish political scene, having canvassed for the Independent Labour Party during his days at Aberdeen, and been a member of the National Party of Scotland since its formation in 1928.[2] By making the modern condition of the Gael the major theme of *The Albannach*, he had taken an active role in promoting Gaelic and nationalism as positive movements in Scotland. The articles he contributed to *The Free Man*, though, have a broader scope than his first novel. While still urgently concerned with language and nationalism, any slight comic relief that counter-balanced the serious cultural concerns in *The Albannach* makes way for an altogether more serious tone.

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[1] 'Editorial', *The Free Man*, 6 February 1932, pp. 1-2.

[2] See I.G.C. Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.83. 'In the 1920s it became apparent that, with the Liberals destined for oblivion, hopes had to be pinned on Labour. But by about 1928, it was evident that a Home Rule measure would not easily win a Commons majority, and Labour politicians turned away from this policy as the attractions of a more centralised socialism grew.'

In 'Mein Bumpf' Mac Colla makes a brief comment on his lack of commercial success as a novelist, by referring, humorously, to the 'perceptive, anonymous reviewer' of *The Albannach* in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1932:

> The conclusion, unexpected and logical at once, reveals that the book was conceived as a whole, and that under its fierce angers at the ugliness a bleak and hideous disease of the human spirit has forced on Scots national life for the past few centuries lies a vital hope, a hard and wholesome resolution, neither sentimental avoidance nor the mere querulousness of revolt, but that acceptance which is the ground of creation in both life and art…if Mr Mac Colla fulfils his initial promise the modern Highlands have found their novelist.[3]

Mac Colla continues: 'for reasons beyond his control Mr Mac Colla never fulfilled his initial promise (and never will now). But the modern Highlands have found a whole crop of novelists.[4] This favourable early review of *The Albannach* characterises the optimistic tone in which the book concludes. More importantly it serves to contrast Mac Colla's 'initial promise' at an early age with his subsequent intense focus on the serious issues which came to overshadow his work. In an article entitled 'Mac Colla Yes, Knox No', Alan Bold discusses precisely this paradox which developed around Mac Colla's writing. 'Although others have consistently neglected him as a novelist and ignored him as a thinker Fionn Mac Colla has always taken himself utterly seriously' begins Bold.[5] The article reviews *Too Long in This Condition*, and concentrates on what Bold believes are the unfortunate over-shadowing themes in Mac Colla's work. 'Although I am sympathetic to much of what Mac Colla says I do think his obsession with John Knox is misguided and that it has reached such proportions as to have distorted his artistic priorities: in short his Knox-bashing has occupied too much of his creative time.'[6] Bold continues:

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[3] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p. 14-15
[4] Ibid.
[5] Alan Bold, 'Mac Colla Yes, Knox No', in *Scotia Review*, ed. by David Morrison, 10 (1975), pp. 26-29 (26).
[6] Ibid., p.27.

> Personally, I feel there is considerable magic in much of what Mac Colla has written only when he … stops gnawing his theological bone. Because of his neglect he became bitter: … After all he gave up a successful academic career in Palestine to come back to Scotland in 1928. And to come back to what? He wrote novels to initiate an awareness of the Gaelic past – and they were ignored. He attempted to organise an occupation of Rum – and the plan was leaked to the press and thwarted. Because he has felt he has not had his due – and he most certainly has not – he has felt obliged to insist on his intellectual worth. Unfortunately in this mood he becomes the very image of the Scottish puritanical pedagogue.[7]

It is Bold's identification of Mac Colla's need to 'insist on his intellectual worth' which shall be the focus of this chapter, for it is in *The Free Man* articles which Mac Colla contributed in the brief hiatus between the publication of *The Albannach* and the commencement of *And the Cock Crew*, which have never been detailed before, in which Mac Colla first demonstrates the historical arguments and political anger which would be produced at length in the second novel. In doing this, he moved away from the promotion of an affirming Gaelic culture and nationalism.

This chapter will document some of the more substantial contributions to this newspaper by Fionn Mac Colla, though an important thirteen-part essay entitled 'Cùis na Cànain' (State of the Language) will be examined in the next chapter in order to highlight its specific relationship to *And the Cock Crew*. It is worth bearing in mind what Bold says about Mac Colla's motivations: '…Fionn Mac Colla has dedicated his life to what he believes to be the truth about Scotland: that this physically small nation has enormous metaphysical riches that have been locked away by a miserly establishment committed to the naysaying philosophy of John Knox.'[8] The philosophy of John Knox became a serious focus in Mac Colla's later work, but importantly, Bold highlights Mac Colla's initial, core argument for Scotland's

[7] Bold in Morrison, 1975, p.28.
[8] Ibid

'metaphysical riches'. Nonetheless, *The Free Man* articles establish this argument through the polemic for which Mac Colla's detractors criticise him most.[9]

Opposition: 'The Imbecility of Compromise'

Among Mac Colla's earliest contributions to *The Free Man* is a short article entitled 'The Imbecility of Compromise'. Published in October 1932, it presents nationalism in a Scottish context as the 'highest plane' of contemporary discourse, connecting the state of the nation to the psychology and productiveness of its people:

> Before any question can be argued clearly it is always necessary to state the principles involved on the highest plane on which they apply. Scottish nationalism can be stated on the highest, i.e., metaphysical, plane to concern the principle of being; to assume the fullest degree of being which can be manifested in Scottishness. An absolute principle is therefore involved, from which it follows, first that all opposition to Scottish Nationalism so understood is ruled out of court, since it assumes the metaphysical absurdity that non-being or, so to speak, partial being is superior to complete being; and second, that all compromise or stopping short in the practical application of the principle is an imbecility, which is the same as to say that there can be no such thing as 'moderate' nationalism except in the same sense as there is moderate intelligence…As Scottish Culture is the fine flower of expression of Scottishness, a true nationalism would act in this sphere in the way of removing barriers to the completeness and freedom of such expression, e.g., the exclusive and compulsory use of English constitutes definitely a barrier of this kind; therefore, I hold that there ought to be a return to Gaelic which, while structurally and historically related to Irish, is nevertheless in its modern form the peculiar creation of the Scottish mind.[10]

Mac Colla dismisses any opposition to Scottish nationalism as absurd: Scotland is a separate nation with separate economic concerns, at odds with a 'system which is unable to provide so many with the possibility of life above the level of mere

[9] Studying *The Free Man*, gives an interesting glimpse into the significance of twentieth-century periodical culture. Derick Thomson notes the importance of Gaelic-themed periodicals alone: '…they have almost always come into being in response to ideological or dogmatic needs…' noting that the earliest recorded Gaelic periodical dates to 1803 (*An Rosroine*). Although most had a strongly evangelical flavour in the eighteenth century, 'later periodicals veer away from the evangelical line…*An Gaidheal* [which Mac Colla contributed to, as will be detailed] showed ' a preference for antiquarian, historical and literary topics but without neglecting current affairs.' Although not a Gaelic periodical, *The Free Man* exemplifies the nature of this intellectual periodical culture, which was to create a discourse where there was none. See Thomson, 1992, p.222.

[10] Fionn Mac Colla, 'The Imbecility of Compromise', *The Free Man*, 22 October, 1932, p. 3.

existence'. The improvement of the social sphere is linked to improvement of the economic sphere through nationalism; a further aspect of Mac Colla's case for Scottish independence. Economic concerns are coupled not only with social concerns, but also with the 'fine flower' of cultural expression of the nation, these issues being central to removing the barriers to 'the completeness and freedom of such expression'. The final matter however, is the substance of the nationalism in Mac Colla's article, the 'fine flower itself'. The insistence that Scotland 'return to Gaelic' advocates a revolution for cultural and intellectual independence. He had attempted to instigate 'revolutions' before, such as his ill-fated Rum land-raid; Mac Colla possessed a radical determination to change Scotland. The professional context alone in which 'The Imbecility of Compromise' was written places him at the centre of the Scottish nationalist movement. As a writer and a cultural thinker, he is publicly establishing a political agenda in this journalism.

With hindsight it is possible now to view Mac Colla's work in the context of the progress made by the Scottish nationalist cause and to keep in mind to what extent his key principles have been realised. The article closes though, with an acknowledgment that his agenda for Scotland is one of many: 'Scottish Nationalism may in the event develop in far other ways than these, but in view of the absolute principle already stated I believe such development will represent a corresponding failure to reflect higher realities.'[11]

'O Ree, What Have We Lost!'[12] 'Scots Put to Shame'

Following 'The Imbecility of Compromise', *The Free Man* published Mac Colla's article 'Scots Put to Shame' in January 1933. In it, Mac Colla attacks the

[11] Mac Colla, 1932, p.3.
[12] An exclamation from *The Albannach*, 1984, p.97.

cultural state of Scotland. The article focuses on the 'Gaelic enthusiast', and is ostensibly a promotion of the work of Father Henry Cyril Dieckhoff (1869-1950) a Russian priest who had lived in the Highlands of Scotland whose dictionary based on the dialect of Gaelic spoken in Glengarry, *A Pronouncing Dictionary of Scottish Gaelic* (1932), appears to have inspired Mac Colla to write 'Scots Put to Shame'. Essentially arguing against complacency where Gaelic is concerned, Mac Colla opens: 'The emotional type of Gaelic enthusiast – and the type is usually emotional in proportion as it is mentally lazy – is accustomed to point to the very large area over which Gaelic is still spoken in order to support the claim that the language is quite safe from any danger of extinction. Such evidence is superficial and worthless and no evidence.'[13] 'Scots Put to Shame', is a reaction to what, importantly, Mac Colla saw as the lack of any modern progress in terms of the Gaelic language. '…What we have not known how to cherish, others have appreciated. Foreign names were most notable among the leaders of the revival of Celtic studies of sixty or so years ago', he explains.[14] It is the Scots, Mac Colla argues, who are apathetic towards developing the potential of their culture, which demonstrates 'by far the most serious and disquieting aspect of the situation – namely the rapid disintegration of the language from within.'[15] 'To one who does not understand it, Gaelic may sound very much the same in the mouth of any speaker', he writes. 'Emphatically this is not the case', perceptively highlighting the filtering of Gaelic through the generations as 'an ever-widening gulf [which] exists between the speech of the older and younger generations'.[16] Here is the pace of Gaelic's decline in the twentieth century. It is something Mac Colla had already written about in *The Albannach*, and had recalled

[13] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Scots Put to Shame', *The Free Man*, 7 January 1933, pp. 2-3.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

first-hand in his experiences teaching in Laide, and later as a student of Celtic at Glasgow University. 'The latter commonly speak a kind of slovenly and illiterate Gaelic, from which many of the characteristic sounds which made Scottish Gaelic the most melodious language in Europe have disappeared, as has also a great part of a once peculiarly rich and varied vocabulary, which loss has been partially made up by the adoption of large numbers of mispronounced English words.'[17] Scottish disunity and Sectarianism are, once again, criticised by Mac Colla.

For Mac Colla, this emboldened his nationalism. This evaporation symbolised not only the successful assault on Gaelic culture by a foreign government, but the culpable indifference to the fate of the language at home: '… the richer, purer, more idiomatic older Gaelic is only spoken now by individuals who in the natural course of events will be dead within the next twenty years. A priceless heritage will die with them, for there are so far no signs of any steps being taken on the part of any Scottish agency to counteract the effects of two centuries of criminal neglect.' [18] For Mac Colla, the neglect of this language and its modern mutations symbolised in equal measure the condition of Scottish nationhood. *The Albannach* had been an attempt to address the situation through a positive message, 'what we shall recover!' as Father O'Reilly exclaims.[19] But Mac Colla came to accept that the damage was, perhaps, too great. His second novel would develop a negative tone that was beginning to emerge through articles like 'Scots Put to Shame' and focus instead on what was being lost:

> There is a lesson, of course, in the nationality of the author, but I doubt if the majority of my fellow-countrymen can read it. An invasion of Russians or Germans would doubtless save the Gaelic language from extinction; it begins to seem rather late in the day to expect the Scots to awaken to a sense of responsibility in the matter. [20]

[17] Mac Colla, 1933, p.2.
[18] Ibid.
[19] *The Albannach*, 1984, p. 97.
[20] Mac Colla, 1933, p.2.

The Finnish Example

The reference to the 'invasion of Russians or Germans' in 'Scots Put to Shame' may have held contemporary significance in a geopolitical sense in 1933, but the sentiment behind the international contexts for Gaelic and Scotland further resonates in his next substantial article in *The Free Man,* entitled 'Johan Vilhelm Snellman', written under a byline: Ludovic Grant. J.B Caird notes in a review of Karl Miller's *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland* (1970) that:

> He [Miller] recalls the days of The Freeman [sic] that Scottish Nationalist-Social Credit forum of opinion so vigorously and pugnaciously run by R.M. Black. He vividly describes those days where in a small but lofty office in India Buildings overlooking the West Bow, MacDiarmid, Fionn Mac Colla and George Dott, that genial statistician, held court and willingly disputed with anyone who chanced to drop in. It was there at the beginning of 1933 that I first met both MacDiarmid and Mac Colla, whose *The Albannach* had recently been published. MacDiarmid was writing a series of critical and polemical articles for the paper while Mac Colla contributed weekly essays on Highland and Gaelic themes, sometimes under the pseudonym of 'Ludovic Grant'.[21]

Depending on the spelling, there are two Ludovic Grants whom Mac Colla could be referencing here. The earliest, Ludovic Grant b. 1688, was a Jacobite captured at the battle of Preston in 1715 and banished to South Carolina where, in 1725, he married a woman named Euguioote, the sister of a famous Cherokee warrior. As a licensed Indian Trader, Grant was trusted to negotiate between the Cherokee and the various governors of South Carolina. A letter written to Governor James Glen in 1756 acknowledges his importance: 'It is about thirty years since I went into the Cherokee Country where I have resided ever since … I have also been acquainted with the headman in every part of the Nation, as I speak their language I have been often consulted by them about their affairs.'[22] The cultural transaction undertaken by

[21] James B. Caird, 'Memoirs of a Modern Scotland', *Scottish International*, 10 (1970), p.47.
[22] Jerry A. Maddox, *The Legacy of Ludovic Grant* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2007), p.60-61.

Ludovic Grant is entirely compatible with Mac Colla's own cultural agenda with regard to marginalised culture and language. Grant represents the example of stable cultural engagement without representing a threat: 'As the ancestor of thousands of mixed-blood Cherokees, [Grant's] legacy has continued to this day throughout the Cherokee nation and America.'[23]

Conversely, Ludovick Grant b.1707 was an eighteenth-century Highland chieftain with an interesting family background and position in history, not least owing to the role he played in the aftermath of the battle of Culloden: 'To show his zeal for the Government after Culloden, Ludovick Grant marched his Strathspey men, eight hundred strong, into Urquhart and Glenmoriston, and under threat of fire and sword arrested his clansmen who had been "out". The fighting men were handed over to the Duke of Cumberland, and most of them were transported.'[24] In an article about the Peter Watkins 1964 BBC film *Culloden*, Mitchell Minner writes:

> … As Peter Watkins' film shows, and evidence will attest, it was just one day after the battle that Ludovic Grant became the first Highland chief to show his new loyalty to the British state by sacrificing those of his clan flock who had fought for Charles. The bribes, pay-offs and Cheviots were yet to come, but the process started early. Indeed, chiefs had already been involved since 1743 in a lucrative system of human barter with recruitment for the new Highland regiments…[25]

Mac Colla used this name as a byline on a number of occasions in *The Free Man* though it can only be assumed that he was aware of the very different biographies that can be applied to it. The first connotes the Jacobite banished to the Americas who becomes a de facto Cherokee Indian, while the other is a Highland Chieftain who turned over his clansmen to the British government after Culloden. The byline itself is a commentary on Mac Colla's politics and international attitude, highlighting their

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[23] Ibid., p.53.
[24] *Publications of the Scottish History Society, Second Series, Vol. II, Origins of the 'Forty Five,* 1916*,* p. 36.
[25] Mitchell Miller, 'Peter Watkins' Culloden', *The Drouth*, Summer 2003, 59-61, (p.59).

most negative and positive aspects. It is also an indication of the contemporary impact that history had on his thinking which was to become a particular development with *And the Cock Crew*. It also suggests, as with 'Scots Put to Shame', that Mac Colla was attacking the nation that Scotland was, and the Scots that had made it that way, as part of his agenda. It is within this context of international influence and historical relevance to contemporary society and politics that he wrote 'Johan Vilhelm Snellman' for *The Free Man* in June 1933.

In this article, he examines the work of the Fennoman philosopher and statesman, instrumental in establishing the Finnish language as the predominant tongue in Finland, and it is not difficult to see the parallels that Mac Colla drew between the Finnish struggle of the nineteenth century and the struggle he hoped would take place in Scotland. He begins:

> If what Scotland needs most of all at the moment is to be awakened to consciousness of her real state, perhaps nothing would be more useful to her than a knowledge of the recent history of other small nations of Europe. If she had such a knowledge it is to be hoped that she would find in it what would determine her towards independence and fix in her mind an invincible dissatisfaction with any state less dignified and free than others.[26]

Mac Colla's committed nationalism has been established, but what this article demonstrates is his willingness to look to other small European nations for examples of the success of his own ideas for Scotland. What he saw was that his desire to revolutionise society and culture and politics was not without precedence. The idea that a traditional language could be established as a modern national tongue in an independent political state, as had happened in Finland, was a clear example of the possibilities for a future Scotland, and was an inspiration. It also demonstrates his serious frustration at his fellow Scots who, as can be seen in 'Scots Put to Shame', he

[26] Ludovic Grant, 'Johan Vilhelm Snellman', *The Free Man*, 10 June 1933, pp. 3-4.

saw as either unwilling or unable to do what must be done. 'Dignity and freedom', he writes, are absent, and should Scotland care to look across to the smaller nations of Europe, this 'might make her a little ashamed of her own pauper's rags of dependence.'[27] The people of Scotland, he believed, were standing in the way of their own independence and were perpetuating a cycle which had been set in place centuries before. As he says in *Too Long in this Condition*, the blocks in place of building a new nation are all too clear:

> In due course I understood – the Kirk taking no stand in the matter – why there was so continuous an ability-drain, and so conspicuous a social inequity. *We Scots did not control the mechanisms of government, whereby we could have moved against the truly monstrous wrongs of our society. We were almost singular among nations in this vital deprivation…*The early realisation that all the ills of Scotland were of their nature rectifiable, but could not be rectified for the simple reason that the Scots were not in authority in their own house, meant that through my total frustration I was in a condition of angry resentment from an early age – not a wild, uncontrolled rage, but a controlled burning indignation of a moral sort, which filled every part of my being.[28]

Mac Colla's frustration would begin to find an output through his novels, which as they developed, began to focus on the 'leaders' of Scottish history who would bear the brunt of his anger. 'Scotland has managed to produce only crude commercialists, mercenary builders of Empire, and a multitude of pretentious nobodies. Johan Vilhelm Snellman belongs to that class of statesmen patriots of which Scotland in two hundred years has produced no one worthy of membership.'[29]

In discussing the life and work of Snellman in the short article, Mac Colla draws parallels between the language situation in the Finland of the mid nineteenth century and the Scotland of the early twentieth century. He understood Sweden's dominance over the majority Finnish population as akin to England's dominance over

[27] Ibid.
[28] Mac Colla, 1975, p.34.
[29] Grant, 1933, pp. 3-4.

Scotland: 'Although the Swedes were a small minority of the nation they had managed to exclude the Finns and the Finnish language from any public place.'[30]

It is certainly possible to take issue with Mac Colla's comparisons between Scotland and Finland, with the most obvious problem being that while Sweden dominated Finland and Swedish was the language of education, the majority of the population spoke Finnish. Leaving Scots out of the equation, even by the 1920s, Gaelic, though still a significant language in Scotland, was quickly approaching a position from which there would likely be no recovery. Mac Colla does acknowledge these differences, but is adamant that Snellman could still be held up as an example of what could be done if only there was the will and the commitment of the people: 'His [Snellman's] whole life ought to be an inspiration to young Scots of to-day who are concerned about their country, and especially so as the language situation in Finland at the beginning of last century is in many respects strikingly paralleled in Scotland at the present time – although, of course, in other respects it differs entirely.' [31]

The differences may have stood in the way of any direct comparisons with the solution to the language problem concerning Gaelic in Scotland, but the problems which had existed in Finland were clearly mirrored in Scottish politics and society. 'If a Finnish boy wished to be educated he had to go to a Swedish school, and every road of advancement was closed to him unless he was prepared to give up his own name and adopt a Swedish one – just as in Scotland the only language of education is English and Scottish names are used in English forms.' [32]

Snellman found himself persecuted as a result of his Finnish patriotism, and was forced to leave his university before entering a self-imposed exile in Germany and Sweden. As Mac Colla observes: 'His experience is not without significance; any

[30] Ibid.
[31] Grant, 1933, p.3.
[32] Ibid.

young Scot of equal ability who sought to perform a similar service to the Gaelic language could expect no less to be deprived of recognition and elbowed out of academic life.'[33] As to how far Mac Colla identified personally with Snellman, it would be difficult to guess. It is clear that he considered the Scottish predicament to be worse than that of Finland. Comparing Snellman to the contemporary Scots in 'economic exile' down south, he writes: '…unlike so many Scots who have made names for themselves in London, he did not forget about his country's claims upon him.' Mac Colla also compares the ability of the nationalists, and the state of patriotism, in Finland, with Scotland. For example, when he compares the 'moderate' Finnish nationalists who opposed Snellman, with the Scottish nationalist movement, he writes:

> These men resembled the majority of Scottish nationalists to-day, except, of course, that they were more intelligent and incomparably more cultivated. They thought they were patriots and uncompromising nationalists when in fact they had never attempted to put aside their prejudices and discover the real basis for any possible Finnish nationalism. They wanted to be Finns, but without ceasing to be Swedes. Just as a great many who would like to consider themselves Scottish nationalists wish a Scottish nationalism without effort, wish to be Scottish without ceasing to be English-speaking and Anglicised in mind – an impossibility.[34]

It is clear then, that one of Mac Colla's objectives in writing his *Free Man* articles was to present a thesis on what needed to happen in Scotland and that this could only be done through the tireless efforts of dedicated intellectuals. Despite the fact that Gaelic may not have been the primary tongue of many people in Scotland at the time, Mac Colla could at least point to the intellectuals credited with starting the Finnish movement. Snellman, for example, was not a native Finnish speaker: 'The modern Finnish movement might be considered to have its beginning on that occasion when he [Snellman] and twenty-seven other Swedish-speaking students took a vow

[33] Ibid.
[34] Grant, 1933, p.3.

not to leave the university till they had acquired the Finnish language; and even so early as this it was already his ambition to make Finland an independent, Finnish-speaking nation.'[35]

For Mac Colla, Finland was an example which could be followed in principle, if not in practice. Leaving aside practical action, what the example of Finland could do was inspire the cause: 'Can their labours not inspire us to do something also for the only nation now that declines to take her place on the map?' he concludes.[36]

The promotion of nationalism was the central agenda of *The Free Man*, but in Mac Colla it had a dedicated Gaelic 'correspondent'. That he was employed to write about and discuss Scottish nationalism in a Gaelic context, both historical and contemporary, contributes to the relevance that important literary and political figures like Hugh MacDiarmid had placed on the revival of both Gaelic and Scots. Mac Colla's contributions demonstrate that Gaelic's place in modern Scottish literature and politics was being re-evaluated and re-imagined at that time by major literary figures, and that a new place for it was being carved in Scottish society.

'Scotland's Share of Guilt'

Mac Colla devotes much time in *The Free Man* to addressing the reasons behind Scotland's apparent reluctance to embrace nationalism. The article 'Scotland's Share of Guilt' (17 June 1933) is an example of this point. In this article Mac Colla once again turns his attention to the wider European condition, attempting to demonstrate the historical, imperial and intellectual role that Scots had had in bringing Europe to the brink of ideological war in the 1930s. This article is an early example of what Mac Colla saw as the positive role that particular religious or

[35] Grant, 1933, p.3.
[36] Ibid.

spiritual beliefs could have on the human condition, though it does not directly extol the virtues of any particular faith. 'Scotland's Share of Guilt' begins by plotting Scotland's place among the European nations, culturally as well as politically: 'To state that Scotland is a part of Europe, stands to the European unity in the relation of a part to the whole, is to state the obvious and straightforward which has nevertheless been forgotten about or ignored in practice for over two centuries, with disastrous consequences.'[37] Mac Colla goes on to elaborate that it is these consequences that have forced Europe to the brink and that, 'those consequences, or rather the work of removing them, measures the dimensions of Scotland's task so soon as she shall have regained her independence and become mistress of her actions.'[38] This sort of remark highlights a problem. It appears in this article as though he is referencing a historical significance of Scotland along with Ireland, seeming to imply that the Gaels were the early guardians and developers of Christian civilisation in a mostly pagan, post-Roman Europe. This is a subject he specifically returns to in the 'Cùis na Cànain' series in *The Free Man* which will be discussed in the final chapter. Scotland should have been a major civilising influence on Europe, Mac Colla insists, but instead, Europe's contemporary trouble could be placed in some part, at her door.

It is difficult to judge Mac Colla's hypothesis in this context alone as it can appear as a fantastic exaggeration of his own view of Scottish nationalism and Gaelic, and their importance on the European stage. However, this article marks an important step in Mac Colla's literary chronology as it combines his senses of nationalism and Gaelic, but also demonstrates the importance he placed on the unity of mankind which at this time in his life was influencing his move away from the extreme notions of the

[37] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Scotland's Share of Guilt', *The Free Man*, 17 June 1933, pp. 3 -4.
[38] Ibid.

Elect with which he had grown up, and towards the Catholic Church.[39] All of these things he brought together in his examination of Europe's position during the 1930s.

'Scotland's Share of Guilt', as with the bulk of his *Free Man* articles, though fairly short in length, is significant for its references to international current affairs of the 1930s: '…It seems to me that if European culture is threatened now from a number of new quarters, and if European humanity is beset by evils of a kind or extent unknown formerly, then it would be impossible to acquit Scotland of some share at least in the responsibility for such an unhappy state of affairs.'[40] It is testament to his focus and concern that such references to current international affairs take into account aspects of Scottish political and cultural history which are unflattering. He was not an unthinking 'Scoto-phile'. He continues: '… I am mistaken if when that responsibility comes to be justly apportioned our country is not found to bear a heavier share than any other.'[41] That Scotland could be apportioned a heavier share of responsibility than any other nation with regard to the contemporary situation of Europe in the 1930s, seems purposefully provocative. Importantly, he is not blaming England for Scotland's problems – but he is blaming the Scots for Europe's problems. Mac Colla criticises other nationalists, and he criticises what he regarded as an apathetic consideration and a lack of intellectualised radicalism in Scotland with regard to society, culture and national history. If the national interest were to always be in the background, then criticism would have to be accepted. Independence would benefit from a strong, aware, intellectual base; it would not, however, benefit through laying blame for the current state of the nation without an inward glance. Indeed, as can be seen from his novels, English characters barely make any appearances in Mac Colla's work, and the 'villains' are undoubtedly those

[39] Mac Colla was received into the Roman Catholic Church at Dundee, taking the name Joseph.
[40] Mac Colla, 17 June 1933, p.3.
[41] Ibid.

Ministers and Lowland Scots whose actions made a recognisable impact in the Highlands. England is an alien and distant foreign power to the characters in Mac Colla's novels. His first priority was to deal with the situation in Scotland.

With reference to the state of Europe, Scots are certainly not accused of being Nazi sympathisers in this article. During the war, however, certain figures in the nationalist movement were. Homes were raided and some were imprisoned, though never charged, under the suspicion of preparing to collude as part of a puppet government for Hitler should the invasion of Britain (Operation Sea Lion) succeed.[42] In 1941, MacDiarmid took the opportunity to write a letter to the Secretary of State for Scotland, Thomas Johnston, to complain about a manuscript of his which had been confiscated after such a raid on H.J. Miller, the editor of the *Scottish Socialist*, and this helps to outline the position from certain nationalist perspectives towards Westminster. It also highlights that there was a perceived threat from 'literary nationalists':

> Apart from the purely political aspect of the matter, the seizure of my MSS calls for the strongest protest and immediate action as does the utterly unwarrantable interference with Free Speech and Scottish cultural interests represented by the raids on *The Scots Socialist*, the *Free Man* and *Scottish News and Comment*, and the internment of Arthur Donaldson, the editor of the last mentioned, in Barlinnie. Douglas Young, of Aberdeen, is another Scottish author who has been raided, questioned, and grossly victimised in this way by the English Gestapo, and further cases are those of Mrs Hay of Edinburgh, mother of George Campbell Hay, the Scottish Gaelic poet and literary essayist, and – worst of all – the Rev John MacKechnie of Glasgow, whose houses have been twice searched and who has had seized from him invaluable Gaelic MSS by great 18th Century Scottish poets like Iain Lom and Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, simply because they are in Gaelic and ipso facto objects of suspicion to our ignorant English and Anglo-Scottish CID people.[43]

[42] According to Grieve, Edwards and Riach: 'In a co-ordinated action at 6am on 2 May 1941, acting on instructions from MI5, police raided the homes of seventeen Scottish nationalists', (Hugh MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters*, ed. by Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001), pp.191-2).
[43] Ibid.

This highlights the 'alien' nature of Gaelic within the United Kingdom. Gaelic was clearly seen as suspicious, or at least that it had been acquired by suspicious people, and it was clearly associated with nationalism by this time. Scottish nationalism and the writers who inspired it were considered of interest to the British establishment.

Mac Colla's contention was, however, that Scotland's share of guilt was rooted much deeper in history than the contemporary situation and unfounded suspicions of Nazi collaboration. Mac Colla writes that Scotland, like every other nation in Europe had a responsibility for the continent's stability. In viewing Europe in this way, it could be said that Mac Colla, as an advocate of a Scotland free and in Europe was ahead of his time. 'Let it be said right away', he writes, 'and by way of answering an objection, that Scotland did not shuffle off responsibility when she permitted herself to become politically non-existent and thereby deprived herself of the machinery for expressing the national will.'[44] A portion of Scotland's share of guilt for the European situation, it seems, is in the denial of the responsibility she has to the other nations of Europe. In shirking this responsibility by signing away independence with the Act of Union in 1707, in Mac Colla's eyes at least, Scotland had essentially aligned herself forever to do nothing. Political dependence meant, essentially, inaction for every matter of political significance. 'It will not do to say that Scotland cannot be to blame for the present state of Europe because she had no means of expressing herself against the tendencies which brought it about. Inaction in the face of tendencies in operation is a kind of action, and if Scotland neglected to acquire the means of resisting those tendencies it is as much as if she had assisted them.'[45] In other words, evil prospers when good nations do nothing and Mac Colla was laying this at the door of his own nation, which had for centuries been willing to

[44] Mac Colla, 17 June 1933, p.3.
[45] Ibid.

have its authority and political control subsumed in trade for imperial wealth. 'Most Scots were only too eager to postpone considerations of duty and country and in the hope of gain to throw themselves headlong into the stream of "Progress"'.

Mac Colla was particularly outspoken against what he saw as the most destructive form of totalitarianism in Scotland: Calvinism. He would in later years come to draw parallels between the various forms of totalitarian regimes he saw as having contributed not only to Scotland's and Gaelic's demise, but to humanity's deception. Spanning the centuries in his work, he would include Kings, philosophers and ideologists, religious reformers and politicians. Indeed, the cover design for *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, displays likenesses of Henry VIII, Lenin, Hitler and John Knox, all of whom, according to Mac Colla, had consciously or otherwise, served to restrain and suppress man's potential. Calvinism, however, would become Mac Colla's most bitter obsession, and it is in 'Scotland's Share of Guilt', that his argument against it began to take shape and gather force. While *The Albannach* focussed on promoting the positive influences of Gaelic culture on Scotland, and was nevertheless able to take a few swipes at the Free Church whose doctrines he saw as being in direct opposition to these positive influences, his later work would focus primarily on what he considered to be the psychological motivations behind the destructive totalitarianism of such doctrines. 'Calvin is another who would have refused to recognise his offspring', he writes, with reference to the legacy of Protestantism, 'but his denial at this time of day would avail nothing to disprove the entirely sound statement of Troltsch and Max Weber, that the native soil of capitalism is Calvinism, and it was born in Scotland and Puritan England.'[46]

[46] Ibid.

At this stage in his argument Mac Colla equates the economic and political forces of the 1930s with philosophies of the past few centuries, as implemented by specific men. Quoting an unnamed, 'modern and much sounder philosopher', Mac Colla attempts to clarify his own position with relation to modern society:

> In such a conception (Cartesian dualism transferred into the order of political and economic relations) politics and economics have each their own peculiar and specific ends, which are not human ends, but purely material ends. The end of politics is the material prosperity, the power and success of the State, and everything that may procure such an end – even an act of treachery or an act of injustice – is POLITICALLY good. The end of economics is the acquisition and limitless increase of riches, material riches as such. And everything that may procure such an end – even an act of injustice, even oppressive and inhuman conditions of life – is ECONOMICALLY good.[47]

Mac Colla draws together many facets in this article: religion, philosophy, economics and politics, and insists that the current state of society is inextricably linked to the human psyche, and that contemporary events can never be simplified into black and white arguments, but have deep psychological roots. This lays the path for his encompassing intellectual arguments which can be seen in *And the Cock Crew*, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* and *The Ministers*.

In a review of Mac Colla's last book *Too Long in this Condition,* John Herdman describes the kind of Scotland that Mac Colla saw around him: 'The Scotland which this book describes is one in which a positive spirit of the quality of Mac Colla is allowed to go to the wall while another breed flourishes: the breed of what he himself terms "gnyaffs", a Russian editor whom he quotes calls "tenth-rate bums", and a friend of mine refers to simply as "creatures".'[48] As the argument goes, it is these 'gnyaffs', 'creatures' and 'tenth-rate bums', unequipped with the 'facts', who can never know or comprehend the truths Mac Colla insists upon in 'Scotland's Share of Guilt', and as such it is their will to sink humanity to their own level of

[47] Mac Colla, 17 June 1933, p.3.
[48] Herdman, 1975, p.32.

mediocrity in their pursuit of control, power and material gain. Of such persons, Scotland had made a contribution out of all proportion:

> Descartes, Calvin, with Rousseau and Luther, are the fathers of the modern world, but it was Scotland more than any other part of Europe which laboured to bring that world to its birth. If the peculiar evils of our age are the result of false ideas originating in the minds of those great initiators, it was surely Scotland more than any other which led the way, and set the pace, in the translation of those ideas into practice. Evils and suffering have resulted from the elevation of politics into an end in itself, a POLITICAL and not a human end. What country has carried this to such insane lengths as Scotland? She was on the point of destroying herself as a nation, and has lent her people as tools of innumerable injustices and acts of oppression, simply in order to advance a quite un-human end which had nothing at all to do with herself, the POLITICAL good of England. [49]

Scotland willingly accepted the role as the coloniser's coloniser and deserves a share of guilt for this alone. In this article Mac Colla directly apportions blame, not only to Scotland, but also to Calvinism as an ideology opposed to human nature, and for nurturing capitalism in man's psyche, a system of government that flew in the face of social justice. 'She has displayed a revolting readiness to sacrifice everything in the insensate lust for gain – the beauty of her country, the welfare of her people, her political existence, her national integrity, all the things of culture and of the spirit – and this at the behest of an arid Calvinism, whose social effect is to create "an immense moral motive for action without any counter-balancing intellectual ideal."'[50]

The purpose of 'Scotland's Share of Guilt' is surely to make sense, in public and in print, of the responsibilities of the people towards their own nation. In effect, this article serves as an example of what Mac Colla's role as an author was to become. In *Too Long in this Condition*, looking back over his career he describes himself as a 'Pilgrim of Truth', and elaborates that his autobiography is 'Some account of Mac Colla's lifelong search for Truth, and some of the persons, and the

[49] Mac Colla, 17 June 1933, p.3.
[50] Ibid.

verities, he encountered on the way, together with some explanation of the state of Scotland.'[51] Written over forty years after 'Scotland's Share of Guilt', he never wavered in this dedication. His motivation for writing this article is this sense of 'Truth' and this 'lifelong search' begins to develop in his work during his time at *The Free Man*. Mac Colla offers no absolution in 'Scotland's Share of Guilt'; rather, Scots must understand the history which links Scotland and the union to the contemporary European situation, for they all stem from the same source:

> …If humanity is suffering from having recently followed a course of unrestrained materialism, from having adored and worshipped, instead of merely used, external and non-human things, from having placed its Highest Good outside itself, but in something less than itself, the material universe, namely; then in all those matters Scotland has forced the pace, and at no moment of recent history has she not been found to occupy a position more extreme than any. [52]

With Europe on the brink of war, Mac Colla attempts to rally his readership with examples of the cause of Scotland's economic and social problems in the hope of springing away from the mistakes of history. 'Naturally and justly, it is she [Scotland] that suffers most from the consequences', he writes, as his language escalates: 'Her country is more devastated than any other, her national economy more dilapidated. Her people exist under more inhuman conditions. The greatest intellectual desert in Europe is within her borders. She is spiritually bankrupt and culturally barbarous. She is so miserable that she is unaware of her misery, and from her seat on the scrapheap of nations, and dressed only in the filthy tatters of her nationality, leers with an imbecile complacency that revolts a continent.'[53]

The final lesson of 'Scotland's Share of Guilt' as Mac Colla would have it, and the only positive move forward, is nationalism:

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[51] Mac Colla, 1975, p.4.
[52] Mac Colla, 1933, p.4.
[53] Ibid.

> Autonomous nations may blunder and go wrong certainly; but if you want a really vicious and antisocial nation, one equally ready to play the part of a parasite, a flunkey, or an Iscariot, take a nation gone astray from herself, without honour or self-respect, content with servitude. Take a nation that throws dirt on its past. Take Scotland.[54]

'The Psychology of the Anglophile' and the Advantages of a Marginalised Language

Given the serious nature and angry tone of 'Scotland's Share of Guilt', Mac Colla's next contribution to *The Free Man*, on 8 June 1933, 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' is, in comparison, fairly light-hearted. Nevertheless, like all of his significant articles, it too promotes the serious message of the importance of Scottish independence – though the article is also a very good demonstration of Mac Colla's erudite and articulate language: 'That is the worst of the English language; sooner or later one is bound to find oneself with a title like the above ["The Psychology of the Anglophile"].' Indeed, this piece for *The Free Man* opens on familiar territory already covered in *The Albannach*, as Mac Colla compares English and Gaelic as languages, extolling the natural virtues of the latter at the expense of the verbosity of the former. 'Surely it [English] is the very best language in the world for pretentiousness and gasbaggery; at any rate I know of no other in which it is so easy to say so little and seem to say so much…the veriest numbskull might pass triumphantly through the whole English-speaking world with an unpunctured reputation for profundity.'[55] 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' is an interesting piece, not so much for its conclusions which at this stage could be predicted but, rather, for the method Mac Colla employs in reaching his conclusions. Indeed, it is not initially clear what his argument will be, though his sentiment is clear as he closes his opening paragraph with a cry which, in equal parts, displays his humour and his

[54] Ibid.
[55] Fionn Mac Colla, 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' *The Free Man*, 8 July 1933, 3-4, (p.3).

exasperation: 'How much closer we should live to reality, how much nearer to essences and real things, if only we were fortunate enough to speak Gaelic instead of English!'[56] One might imagine that this article concerns the intricacies of the Gaelic language. In Gaelic, Mac Colla perceived a more direct tongue, more in tune with his own spirit: 'In the Gaelic language at least there is little scope for humbugs; a man must say what he means, and if he has nothing to say he can hold his tongue, for there is no refuge for him in verbiage.'[57] It is difficult to judge such a proclamation, if one has no Gaelic. It could be argued that such vociferous claims by Mac Colla alienated some of his readership to a degree and left him open to criticism. It is in the security of fluency in a marginalised language that Mac Colla is able to make such statements, safe in the knowledge that those who could criticise him, or take him to task, or attack him, would lack the basic linguistic ability to do so. It therefore places Mac Colla in an advantageous position. He was well aware of the advantages that writing in a marginalised or minority language could present to a writer and it is a subject he discusses briefly in *Too Long in this Condition*. '… The small country and small language group are a great advantage to the poet or writer. In addition to all the other advantages of concentration of population in a small area, there is this that a poet or writer of exceptional genius is instantly perceived to be present.'[58] Once discovered by the 'outside', the writer or poet of the minority language can escape the equally disadvantageous problems faced by the English language writer. Namely, the minority writer will be praised on the standing of:

> …Intrinsic merits or on account of the special originality of his ideas. Whereas the writer who is a member of a large language group has the disadvantage of having to compete with great numbers of others from the outset, and can only

[56] Mac Colla, 8 July 1933, p.3.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Mac Colla, 1975, p.61.

> make his way by trimming his sails to the winds of a degraded popular taste and all the other consequences of commercial interest and control of the arts.[59]

The writer in a minority or marginalised language can have his ideas and setting particularly enriched by the authenticity of the experience, and is in a better position to have his 'intrinsic merits' and 'special originality of his ideas' appreciated by the outside world. Mac Colla gives Icelandic Nobel Prize winner Haldor Laxness as an example, and it is important to note that, to date, no writer or poet in the Gaelic language – with the possible exception of Sorley Maclean's recognition in Ireland – has been recognised to such a degree. Gaelic is a marginalised language in its own nation and it is not a language which easily enjoys international recognition.

'The Psychology of the Anglophile' does not solely concern language. As the title suggests, this article is a look at the 'psyche' of those who Mac Colla considers to be 'Anglophiles'. It is necessary to examine exactly what Mac Colla means when he uses such phrases.

'The Psychology of the Anglophile' begins with a very brief example of Mac Colla's opinions on psychology, though at the beginning he appears to dismiss it while later in the article he defends its scientific merits, suggesting that at this period he was not wholly engaged in its application. He would soon, however, develop strong opinions on psychology that would come to have a great impact on his work and the distinctive dialectics which he frequently employed in his later novels. Beginning his article, he describes the relatively new popular practice as an uncharted territory which is simply unable to answer mankind's fundamental questions. Mac Colla objects to the way in which such a science could be adopted unthinkingly by the masses because it provided simple and easily comprehensible answers to serious and complex questions. In this way, it can be likened to his opinions on the psychology of

[59] Ibid., pp.61-62.

those who embraced the Reformation as well as more contemporary ideological revolutions such as Communism and Fascism.

Psychology, it is claimed, is often an easy way for man to absolve himself from responsibility. This fits in with Mac Colla's thoughts on 'knowing' historical truths. It is easy for man to cling to ideas which provide access to knowledge and, at the same time, further attitudes of superiority. As Mac Colla explains in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* with reference to knowing historical truths:

> …The lie is so much more immediately acceptable than the truth … the lie, although subtly and unperceived it may be, always flatters us in our self-conceit. The concepts "drunkard," [Robert Burns was a drunkard] "wanton," [Mary Queen of Scots was wanton] etc., etc., which we as a matter of general practice and universal observation are extremely ready or at the very least strongly tempted to apply to others on the scantiest evidence, are always accompanied by superiority-feelings in us – psychologically speaking the superiority-feelings are the reason for the attachment of the concept to the name – "child-murderer," "debauchee," and a host of other appellations allow us with great facility to feel "up" with regard to even the greatest personages of the past (or present) and put them "down" with regard to us … Those two facts, that it is always simpler, usually very simple, in structure and therefore demands no effort from us before yielding the satisfaction and security-feelings that go with knowledge, and secondly that it invariably gives free scope to our ego-feelings of power, superiority and self-regard, explain why, as someone has said, "a lie will girdle the earth while truth is putting on his boots."[60]

This is a statement made at the culmination of a lifetime's work. However, his remarks here make for an interesting comparison when read with 'The Psychology of the Anglophile', thirty years earlier. Mac Colla's ideas about what he would come to describe as 'gnyaffs' were beginning to develop at this time; the nay-sayers of *The Albannach* are seen as proponents of sciences and truths that they don't understand but are compelled to follow nonetheless out of mankind's innate desire to feel superior and well-informed. The supreme instinct of the persons in question to

[60] Mac Colla, 1967, p.16.

devolve all responsibility both personally and politically is explained by Mac Colla, tangentially, through descriptions of sexual psychoanalysis.

In discussing people 'addicted to sexual offences or malpractices' Mac Colla dismisses explanations of 'overwhelming temptation' which the offender in question is 'powerless to resist' as 'superficial rationalising' which is 'well known to psychologists'.[61] He never dismisses psychology as a genuine science, but it is not discussed in any great detail. Rather, for Mac Colla, the psyche is compelled to adopt false truths in order to satisfy man with the simplest answers. In *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, the subject is historical truth; in 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' 'sexual compulsions' are the example. Nevertheless, the motivation for diagnosis is the same:

> It will be observed that (in perfect good faith, be it noted) he puts the blame on his physical organisation or his temperament on his "weak will" or *on anything in fact except himself*. The fact is that sexual activities of an undesirable nature are almost invariably a sort of defence-mechanism for the person concerned, whereby he seeks to shuffle off responsibility.[62]

This article is one of Mac Colla's first serious attempts at working the study of human psychology into his writing. Although the argument is in development at this stage, this analysis would be returned to, most famously in the character of Sachairi in *And the Cock Crew*, and would continue henceforth to be included as a major examination in his other novels, *The Ministers* and *Move Up, John*, developing finally into *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*. This was further drawing his focus away from the affirmations made in *The Albannach*. Although the behaviour he sought to examine in his later works focused on his characters who were mostly religious men like Sachairi Wiseman in *And the Cock Crew* and Ewan MacRury in *The Ministers,* this particular article for *The Free Man* is not nearly as in-depth; it does not seriously set

[61] Ibid.
[62] Mac Colla, 8 July, 1933, p.3.

out to investigate what drives men to dedicate themselves to institutions or ideologies and abstract ideas. The argument in 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' does, however, allow him to use it to address the psychology of those who will not support the cause for Scottish independence. It is at this point in the article that he begins to discuss the 'anglophile', which is core to his argument. Moving on from sexuality, he adapts his hypothesis to include nationalism and anti-nationalism:

> …Sexuality is merely the commonest form of defence-mechanism – because it is easiest to offend in that direction and escape public or social consequences. An analogous process may take place wherever one is confronted with a reality too great to be easily faced, and I suggest that a great deal of anti-nationalism, and what we may call Anglophily, is merely the form taken by the flight from the reality which, from the point of view of Scotland's will to freedom, is and has always been England. It is an 'escape' masquerading as a fine sentiment.[63]

The 'Anglophile' then, or the 'anti-nationalist', is highlighted here as being a key obstacle towards Scottish independence and Mac Colla sets out to analyse this creature. 'Few people can really disbelieve in their hearts that Scotland should be free', he declares, but Scottish 'freedom', has in the past provoked English hostility, or in his own words, 'hatred, treachery and brutality.'[64] Should Scotland move with a mind towards independence, he argues, the reaction provoked from the south would be no less reserved in the 1930s than it would have been at any time throughout history. 'Anglophil' sentiments are thus declared in those who fear such hostility, or brutality, or as Mac Colla himself asserts:

> …I am much mistaken if it is not an obscure realisation of this which causes many to profess a false and spurious internationalism and a puerile and narrow imperialism which cannot be reasonably examined and yet held, and to take refuge in an anti-nationalism which is the merest rationalisation of their fears; and which further causes nationalists of the more timid sort to profess Anglophil sentiments, to look for freedom without strife and the attainment of our aims without a bloody outburst on the part of England – the idea seeming to be that 'the English are good fellows and ''twill all be well.'[65]

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

So far, it is possible to see how Mac Colla's analysis of psychology, as demonstrated in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* with reference to historical truth, can be applied to those suffering from what Mac Colla terms 'Anglophily.' One of the most telling remarks from the short extract above, however, is surely Mac Colla's inclusion of 'without strife.' He declares in the article that 'Few people can really disbelieve in their hearts that Scotland should be free', but he continues: 'Even an utter clod, a mere ledger, a perfectly egoistic and selfish person, ought to be able to understand that Scottish control would be more in his selfish interests also.'[66] Even some of those who take the anti-nationalist position then, cannot believe their position to be the most beneficial, according to Mac Colla. This particular form of 'anti-nationalism' becomes the focus for the remainder of the article. His argument concludes that, despite his turn of phrase here, some so afflicted are not necessarily 'anti' nationalism or independence insomuch as they fear the uncertainty of what 'nationalism' could be *with* independence. Therefore, it is easier for peace of mind and security of intellect to adopt this 'Anglophil' position. He counters this by employing what he terms a 'well-known expedient of psychologists', in order to better explain his own position, going on to discuss the implications for the anti-nationalist should they shed their Anglophily, and the main crux of his argument becomes clear: 'ask yourself what would be the situation upon their cessation', he writes.[67] Anglophily, as Mac Colla has it, is a defence mechanism; without it as a crutch, those who are anti-nationalist would face sacrifices which would make very real demands upon them – 'patience, unrewarded work, fortitude and self-restraint, sacrifices – of money, of time, of what have been his interests hitherto (golf perhaps and much comfortable lounging in

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

company of sundry "good fellows")…'[68] Despite this rhetoric and the zeitgeist of 1930s Scotland, Mac Colla's historical, political and social convictions assured that he could never have become a Communist. As Alan Bold notes, he was even '…disapproving of the Communist influence that MacDiarmid exerted on young Scots', but in this Socialist ideal Mac Colla's argument makes demands on people while he attempts to dismiss all opposition by identifying and disabling its motivation.[69] A new Scotland, post independence, would require sacrifices in order to take economic, physical, intellectual and spiritual resources away from England. It is educated country club golfers and the middle classes he accuses here. Given, perhaps, that they would have the most to lose, they are seen by Mac Colla as key figures in the political struggle.

'The Psychology of the Anglophile' is a central article in Mac Colla's contributions to *The Free Man*, when considering his development as a writer, for a number of reasons. Combining his burgeoning interest in psychology with Scottish politics, the article is arguably the first step that he took towards the development of the extreme positions which he adopted in his later work, but the article also contains a few important paragraphs towards the end of the piece which draw attention to the disharmony at the centre of nationalist politics in the early 1930s. Coming close to advocating an armed struggle, or at the very least the mental preparation for one, he turns his attentions from the anti-nationalist to what could be termed the 'receding nationalist.' 'It was really very easy a few years ago to profess an extreme nationalism, for the reason that it was perfectly safe', he writes, and it is at this point that the article addresses the constitutional bickering at the centre of the NPS at the time. After addressing what he declares to be the possibility of an armed struggle

[68] Ibid.
[69] Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid*, (London: Paladin, 1990), p.389.

with England over Scottish independence, Mac Colla accuses some leaders of the independence movement of 'gasbaggery' themselves.

> In such conflicts…it is usual for the leaders of the patriotic party to have the honour of martyrdom thrust upon them, an honour from which only the most heroic and the most humble and selfless do not shrink. That being so, it is quite understandable that from a very human defect of heroism or essential selflessness many who were prominent enough in the patriotic movement in its days of insignificance and seeming hopelessness, should on the approach of the real conflict find reasons (which may appear quite honest convictions to themselves) for moderating their demands.[70]

This last statement leads directly to the next contribution Mac Colla made to *The Free Man*, which is an open letter detailing his resignation from the National Party of Scotland.

The Contemporary Relevance of Politics and Scholarship: The National Party of Scotland and 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note'

On August 19th, 1933, *The Free Man* published a letter to the Editor with the following disclaimer: 'Sir, – The following is a copy of a letter sent to-day by the undersigned four members of the National Council of the National Party of Scotland to the Chairman of the Council.'[71] The letter was undersigned by George Dott, Mary C. Fraser, T. Douglas Macdonald and Stanley Robertson, and is a record of their resignation from the Council and the Party. It highlights the active dissent among the ranks of the nationalist camp during the early 1930s which Mac Colla had warned about in 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' and is a frank account of the most particular displeasure at the perceived capitulations of the National Party of Scotland in some of its proposals for independence: 'We desire to take this opportunity of stating in so many words that our reason is one of irreconcilable differences from our

[70] Ibid.
[71] 'To the Editor: Letter of Resignation from the National Party of Scotland', in *The Free Man*, 19 August, 1933, p.2.

fellow members of Council on grave matters concerning the status and future welfare of Scotland, and that nothing less than such a difference of principle could have compelled us to our present course.'[72] In publishing a letter of resignation in one of the country's most prominent nationalist publications with the preface: 'We cannot feel that this action on our part will come altogether as a surprise to you', suggests clear and public disagreement on key nationalist policies. The policies in question had been recently adopted by the National Party of Scotland and, as the letter states, sought to 'bind Scotland to joint control with England of Foreign Affairs, Defence Forces, Customs and Excise, etc.' Clearly, for nationalists of Mac Colla's brand, nothing short of full independence could possibly be considered, indeed, anything short of this would be wholly rejected. The letter makes this point abundantly clear, and the undersigned 'could never consent to any such intolerable limitation of the freedom of the Scottish people to exercise over all such matters the most unfettered control and to any people outside their borders.' It is made clear that the signatories accept that the decision could have been made in all honesty and for the good of Scotland, but the outcome of such a proposal would, in their eyes, constitute a gross 'betrayal of the national honour of Scotland'. The letter closes with an expression of regret and apologies are offered for misunderstandings on the concept of national freedom. The signatories assure the National Party of Scotland that despite this disagreement and the refusal to support or lend approval to the Party, 'we shall not…by any future action of ours willingly hamper or restrain its activity, for we recognise no enemy in this matter except the domination of England'.[73] The Scottish National Party was formed the following year.[74]

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Pertinent to the coalescing of the disparate nationalist groupings is the fact that, as Lynch discusses, the involvement of the literary figures was not altogether positive and this was especially so of

It is in keeping with the political impetus of *The Free Man* that Mac Colla's articles all have Scottish independence as a particular focus, and it is generally his concluding opinion for every argument. As has been demonstrated, he chose to encompass within this wider argument the aspects of culture and society which had been demonstrably affected by the lack of political autonomy. Independence is continually espoused as the primary solution to setting in order centuries of mismanagement. In 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note', writing under the name of Ludovic Grant, Mac Colla's attention is focussed on the legacy of the Reformation with reference to historical scholarship and contemporary writing. Published on December 3rd1933, 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note', is the first significant article Mac Colla produced since 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' which does not have Gaelic as its central theme. He spent most of the latter part of 1933 engaged with the composition of a series of thirteen articles published regularly in *The Free Man*, entitled 'Cùis na Cànain' (a play on words meaning the state, and fate, of the language) which will be examined in the next chapter. It is important first to comment on how Mac Colla viewed the pressing issues concerning Scotland which remained to be addressed. His *Free Man* articles direct the reader towards the benefits of independence and should, therefore, be considered as related, though distinct, arguments. The articles centre on history, language, scholarship and

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MacDiarmid's role in the early days of the NPS: 'Grieve was representative of a fundamentalist wing of the NPS which provided the party with an extremist image, damaging its electoral efforts. In time, the NPS leadership took steps to root out these extremists, especially as a group of Celtic romantics began to gather around Grieve and attracted negative publicity for the NPS' (See Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff: 2002), p.35. It should be noted that Gunn was a leader of the NPS at this time, and that the former leader Tom Gibson as well as the future SNP leader, Arthur Donaldson, both resigned from the NPS due to 'dissatisfaction with the expulsions' (Ibid., p.37). This demonstrates the varied and complex relationships which were being formed at this time. To compound matters further the Scottish Party, planning a merger with the NPS, 'liked to talk-up the role of the mavericks within the NPS. One of the principle compromises of the NPS in merging with the Scottish Party to form the SNP was to opt for a stronger version of devolution, and drop independence, prompting Mac Colla and others to resign in protest (Ibid., p. 39).

nationalist political figures and include direct comparisons to similar European nations; they are important expressions of what Scottish nationalism would eventually come to represent in the political sphere with the formation of the Scottish National Party in 1934, as envisaged by leading Scottish intellectuals of the period. All of the subject matter covered by Mac Colla in *The Free Man* is crucial to his encompassing view of the Scottish situation, and all of these themes are developed and employed in his later novels. That Gaelic was at the centre of this motivation and concern is clear when it is taken into consideration just how much he writes on the subject. The 'Cùis na Cànain' articles are an example of how great this concern was. The main motivation behind Mac Colla's work at this stage was still the protection of the Gaelic language, but it is clear that his attitude was changing, with his arguments becoming more accusatory.

That 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note' is written under the other pseudonym of 'Ludovic Grant' could account for the openness of Mac Colla's criticism of the effects of the Reformation. Nowhere in *The Free Man* articles published under 'Fionn Mac Colla' does he write so provocatively on the link between Scotland's contemporary cultural and scholarly deficiencies resulting from the '…prejudices engendered by the ecclesiastical controversies of the 16th century.'[75] Ostensibly, this article is a book review in which Mac Colla, with typical fervour, immediately dismisses the book and its author. It quickly becomes a vehicle for him to flex his anger at their inabilities to tackle serious subject matter satisfactorily and he uses this to discuss the sorry state of Scottish cultural and historical scholarship. Presumably, it was even more appealing to him that he was able to satisfy a growing urge to attack the classes which he was increasingly seeing as the most virulent obstruction to

[75] Mac Colla, 2 December 1933, p.8.

independence and to the development of a contemporary and reputable scholarship in Scotland. 'A suave and popular, and anti-Scottish, Edinburgh minister recently wrote a book concerned with the history – particularly the ecclesiastical history – of Scotland…' he begins, … 'and it was reviewed in a prominent Scottish weekly of semi-literary, semi-ecclesiastical flavour by a suave and popular, and anti-Scottish, Glasgow ex M.P.'[76] The attack is sustained throughout, with the qualifications of the critic most notably derided: '…he considers himself competent apparently to set up as a critic in matters of history, particularly ecclesiastical history – on the strength of … what (it must be admitted) has hitherto been demanded in Scotland as the primary qualification for a historian or historical critic, namely, the possession of all the accepted prejudices.'[77]

Scorning those who don't share his views on nationalism as anti-Scottish, and embodying the accusations that were initially made against him in early reviews of *The Albannach*, the article is an aggressive assault on contemporary historical scholarship in Scotland, and asserts that bad criticism and inherent 'prejudice' serve only to recycle dangerous misunderstandings about history. Lazy criticism and incorrect historical scholarship should be counted among the chief grievances of the intellectual nationalists of the 1930s and Mac Colla was active in this intellectual movement. When the National Party of Scotland was formed in 1928, it spoke directly to people like him. The nationalist movements in Scotland and in Wales drew quick and strong support from young intellectuals and radicals. As Christopher Harvie has noted in *Scotland and Nationalism* (2004): 'Both mobilised students and intellectuals; both stressed linguistic distinctiveness and a native tradition of

[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

decentralised democracy, currently under threat.'[78] The independence movement in Scotland attracted fierce young intellectuals like Mac Colla who were not only active voices and votes, but were active critics and writers in their own right, who had very strong opinions on language and history and culture.[79] Lacklustre material published on any matter of their concern would be thoroughly taken to task. Mac Colla appeared to be exactly the type of person that the NPS should and could recruit. Indeed, Mac Colla seems to have been imbued with exactly what Harvie highlights as making up the core support for the new nationalist movement which '…fused traditional nationalists to Catholic intellectuals, journalists and discontented members of the Independent Labour Party.'[80]

Mac Colla considered that almost anything apparently authoritative published on any matter concerning Scotland, whether history or philosophy, politics or psychology, could quite readily be acknowledged by a public lacking any competent critical base. Therefore such work would do nothing but further the extent of general ignorance. 'And so the Scottish public are led to understand that another sound and scholarly work has appeared, and the accepted prejudices become more firmly fixed than ever.'[81] It is these 'prejudices' that Mac Colla believed were active throughout Scottish scholarship and criticism which forms the central theme of 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note'. His opposition to these 'established' directives, aside from his own

[78] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics, 1707 to the present* (London: Routledge, 2004), p.26.
[79] See John MacCormick, *the Flag in the Wind* (London: Victor Gollanz Ltd, 1955), p.14. John MacCormick, Lord Rector of Glasgow University, co-founder of the Glasgow University Student Nationalist Association, and leader of the National Party of Scotland, like Mac Colla and many other future nationalists, began his public political engagement with the Independent Labour Party: 'Socialism in those days was not the doctrine of the state-planned economy which it has since become. The I.L.P. had inherited much of the old Radical tradition of Scotland and for the most part … I was expected not to expound the theories of Karl Marx but merely to give expression to the general sense of injustice and aspiration for a better way of life…'
[80] Ibid., p.28.
[81] Mac Colla, December 2 1933, p.8.

contributions, place him, and others like him, at the centre of the radical arguments for the future direction of Scottish thought and nationhood.

The article allows Mac Colla to discuss historical evangelism to an extent which was, perhaps, not truly envisaged for a publication like *The Free Man,* and it does feel somewhat out of place here. It could be argued that these edifications were not particularly fashionable or much noticed during this 'modernist' and mostly secular-minded period in radical European politics; but it is, again, an important segment which highlights his understanding of the crucial impact of the 'Protestant Ethic' on contemporary Scottish scholarship and nationhood, and it also displays his own knowledge of Christian theology. After conceding that '… the writer approximates more closely to 'historical truth' than has hitherto been the rule with his kind', this rather withered compliment is rescinded through the presentation of the problem extant in Scottish scholarship:

> …What may be considered his main thesis is an old and long exploded fallacy originally perpetrated from motives of sectarian bias or misplaced patriotism, and so sedulously transcribed by each succeeding 'authority' that from the very beginnings of what has passed as historical writing in Scotland it has been accepted – in Scotland – as something not only unquestioned, but unquestionable.[82]

This 'unquestionable' dictat in Scottish history and scholarship, Mac Colla describes as still holding sway over thought in the modern age. And in one of Mac Colla's earliest public criticisms of the subject, Knox is at the centre of this 'prejudice':

> Where he [the author] approaches the truth is in removing the halo from the heads of certain Reformers, particularly of John Knox – but then he is by no means the first in the field here … But we are compelled to suspect that when the eminent and reverend 'Anglophile' thus shows a readiness to assist in removing from his pedestal one figure at least who was no blessing to Scotland, he is not being scholarly or (for a Scot in his position) unusually critical-minded, but is merely following what even one so superficially interested in Scotland as himself is bound to know is the direction of sounder opinion about his own doors...[83]

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

The suggestion is that Mac Colla considers himself enough of an authority on the subject discussed here to reject such scholarship as bogus. It could also be said that he sought to attack such incorrect 'truths' in order to supplant what he considered to be the incorrectly accepted theories on history and Scotland with the 'truths' that he himself had recognised. As a young radical nationalist (still only in his mid twenties) Mac Colla was willing to believe that Scotland could embrace a revolutionary spirit and follow Ireland and even Russia in forging a new nation built on the rediscovered suppressed truths of history. Myths are extremely important in nation-building, especially so in the case of Scotland. Could it be possible to re-write the ignorant half-truths believed by lazy scholars and inspire a political breakthrough? Surely, he must have hoped for this even, or especially, in these early days, and it is clear from articles like 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note' that he was trying to do this. In his defence against criticism for striving towards such a goal, it could be argued that he was doing no more than correcting the biased or at least misinformed scholarship of others. His agenda was an independent Scotland which would accept and promote its Gaelic history. What infuriated him more than almost anything else was the idea that 'real historical truth' had been simply blacked out by the 'unquestionable' institutions which held power. For Mac Colla this was historically and morally wrong. He was not the first to see the development of Capitalism as being ingrained in the 'Protestant Work Ethic' and it is never 'religion' alone which he sees as the problem, but the unquestioned authority of the institutions that a social revolution like the Reformation demanded. This attitude invariably led to accusations of sectarianism but Mac Colla was keen to dismiss these notions and wrote of this struggle in an attempt to explain his position. It is in the foreword to the reprinted editions of *The Albannach* that he makes this case most clearly:

> …I was…as to my official status a foreign missionary of the Church of Scotland (in Palestine). That last fact is crucial, because the attempt was made at the time, as I have little doubt it will be made again, to evade the issues presented in the book by the simple, time-honoured method of suggesting that it was a 'Roman-Catholic' (and therefore treacherous and dishonest) attack upon Presbyterianism. It was nothing of the sort. It was certainly intended as a radical criticism of the life-negating and culture-destroying 'religion' being imposed on the Gael, but it was a criticism I felt entitled to make, with the more fierceness and anger, as being myself at that time 'one of the family'. [84]

At this point, while keeping in mind the tone behind 'An Ecclesiastical Footnote', it is useful to refer to Mac Colla's attitude concerning the impact of religion on Gaelic. He writes in the above passage that he felt entitled to make his criticism on the 'culture-destroying' 'religion' because of the very real experience he had growing up in the Plymouth Brethren. One might allow him the freedom, therefore, to criticise Presbyterianism, as he himself felt that he understood its 'negating' principles. In an over-simplification of the situation, this was Mac Colla's argument with himself – an authoritarian religion he had inherited from his mother, he attributed to the destruction of the culture he had inherited from his father. Nevertheless, it is not simply that he was against the principles of Presbyterianism. He continues in his foreword to break down the factions of Christianity to bare components, which also emphasises the psychological nature of his work:

> There are two attitudes, the one that human nature is in its essence good, the other that human nature is absolutely, radically and irredeemably evil. Those are not two forms or aspects of the same 'religion'; they are totally exclusive one of the other. The first is Christian, the second is not. It was the second which in the sixteenth century, under the name of 'Reformed Christianity' took total command of Scotland.[85]

It could be said that there are none so dedicated as a convert to the cause, and Mac Colla was firm in his convictions, not only that the Reformation had destroyed Gaelic,

[84] Mac Colla, 1984, II.
[85] Ibid.

but that had Catholicism stayed the course, the situation for the Gael would be very different:

> …In the course of my studies, and as a teacher of the History of the Cultures, it could not have failed to come to my knowledge and awareness that the Catholic or as it was historically, simply the Christian Church had all along maintained quite a different doctrine of Man. One which, had it remained in the ascendant, would have prevented the destruction of the Gael and the eventual elimination from the human scene of the last remnants of the Scottish nation, which we are present witnessing.[86]

Mac Colla's revision of the position of the Gael in literature is first seen in *The Albannach*. His involvement in nationalist politics, and his inculcation of this into his work as a historical theme, is seen in *And the Cock Crew* through his analysis of human psychology. In his contributions to *The Free Man*, we can see these themes in the context of their time.

'An Ecclesiastical Footnote' is not an attack on a minister who has touched a nerve. What follows is Mac Colla's conclusion and explanation for making such an example of the minister in question. 'Was Christendom in the sixth century and thereabouts one thing or several? …It is in reality one of the most important questions that can be asked in history' he writes, as he continues with the argument detailed above: 'It is a matter of the gravest concern for Scotland that such as this minister, a person considered most eminent and scholarly, a very leader of the nation, should be complacently writing in the nineteen-thirties exactly as if the thesis he is maintaining had not been finally disposed of in the eighteen-eighties.'[87] The quality of scholarship not only reflects the nation, but drives the nation, and Mac Colla backs the idea that union had denied Scotland her own communication with other European nations during a period of significant cultural, economic and social development: 'Perhaps in the present state of Scotland, cut off since the Union from first-hand contacts with

[86] Ibid.
[87] Mac Colla, 2 December 1933, p.8.

foreign centres of learning and culture, it is too much to expect a Scottish writer of no matter what eminence (in Scotland) to know anything about Continental scholarship in his own subject in the last fifty years. Perhaps we ought to be content so long as Scottish writers on historical subjects follow each other slavishly like a lot of sheep and write nothing unfamiliar and disturbing.'[88] Mac Colla's writing was extreme enough in its era to be unfamiliar to many readers, but 'An Ecclesiastical Foot Note' demonstrates the contemporary political relevance that Mac Colla placed on history. During this time, he was also concerned with the political relevance that Gaelic culture had to play in the emerging nationalist movement.

The Gaelic Movement in Scotland

> What happens to young writers with no reputation? If they use the Gaelic, as they must if they feel and think in it, London is puzzled and made uncomfortable, and Edinburgh is little better. Take, for instance, one of the most definitely national books which have been published lately – Fionn MacColla's *The Albannach* – who is going to read it? It ought to be read by the people it was written about. But it won't be, not yet at any rate.[89]

Naomi Mitchison's opinion on the plight of Gaelic in literature highlights precisely what Fionn Mac Colla had identified as a major problem in Scottish society and culture – that Gaelic culture was not being adequately defended in literature, or taken seriously as a literary medium.[90] It suffered from the indifference of a large portion of the Scottish and British literati, though, most despairingly of all perhaps, by many Gaelic speakers themselves, the result of a generations-long held indoctrination which dictated that in order to progress in the world one must abandon the language of the

[88] Ibid.
[89] Naomi Mitchison, 'From Letters', in *Modernism and Nationalism*, ed. by Margery Palmer McCulloch, pp.253-254.
[90] Derick Thomson notes that: 'The art of novel writing was not practiced in Gaelic until the twentieth century and the output of novels has been very small. There are probably sociological and economic explanations for this. The literate public has always been small, and when a nineteenth-century popular demand was created for Gaelic writings (through Gaelic schools) it is likely that some prejudice existed against fiction ('untruth' as opposed to biblical 'truth'). (Thomson, 1994, p.218).

Highlands and Islands. Motivated through the sheer frustration of his personal experience, Mac Colla was becoming involved in the 'Gaelic Movement' at a very early stage in its twentieth-century development:

> Only when I went to the University and met Gaelic-speaking students did I encounter the indifference we hear so much about.[91] My blundering attempts at conversation were usually received with amusing contempt; few were willing to render me any assistance whatever, and, indeed, I think I am right in my assertion when I say…that most of the indifference comes from the Highlanders themselves, and Gaelic-speaking Highlanders at that.[92]

This passage is taken from a letter written by Mac Colla in 1928, to the editor of *An Gaidheal*, which was the official magazine of *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, the main body tasked with promoting and developing the Gaelic language and culture in Scotland.[93] The history of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* is long and complicated, and a full study of it would need to consider the political, social and economic situation in the Highlands and in Britain as a whole, spanning even the century before *An Comunn Gaidhealach's* first official meeting in 1891, before taking into account the important contribution that individuals made to the cause, but for this study, it is important to understand the contexts and issues which surrounded Gaelic in the late nineteenth century, and which led to the formation of *An Comunn* in April, 1891. *An Comunn* had developed from the concerns over the situation in the Highlands, both cultural and economic, and its formation was the culmination of a long struggle for the cultural recognition Gaels needed if their language was to survive. The nineteenth century altered the Highlands forever, and much legislation was passed and movements founded which would have enormous effects on Gaelic. Frank Thompson's *History*

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[91] Mac Colla attended Glasgow University in 1929 to study Gaelic but left after one year through lack of funds.

[92] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Letter to the Editor', *An Gaidheal*, 23.12 (1928), pp. 187-8.

[93] Thomson's *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 1994, p.48, notes that: 'Founded in Oban in 1891, its aims, as currently stated, are to encourage and support the teaching, learning and use of Gaelic; the study and cultivation of Highland literature, history, music, art and traditions; the social and economic welfare (until recently 'the native industries') of the Highlands and Islands; and the wearing of Highland dress. These, with slight verbal variations, have been the aims from the beginning.'

of An Comunn Gaidhealach (1991) charts the early beginnings of the organisation against the harsh contexts that inspired its inception.

During the period immediately preceding the formation of *An Comunn*, the Highlands were under great economic strain. The Crofters Act of 1886 was very much 'in its infancy', as Thompson has it, and as such could not have gained any great momentum regarding the land let alone the cultural concerns of the dwindling population and speakers of the language. And yet, the 1881 census, (which, thanks to the militancy of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, had been persuaded to include a question on Gaelic speakers): 'while it presented problems in the interpretation of the figures it produced, revealed that 231,594 people in Scotland spoke Gaelic with some fluency among whom 43,738 were Gaelic-speaking monoglots.'[94] And despite this, Thompson notes, the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act 'had seen fit to exclude Gaelic entirely from its provisions.'[95] Nevertheless, Gaelic was able to find a place of acceptance in this climate:

> Understandably, while the fire of political ideals blazed in Gaelic-speaking bellies, Gaelic itself was waiting in the wings, a forlorn and lonely figure which, by its very nature, had no political clout. Despite the linking of the 'land and language' on the political platforms of the Land Leaguers, Gaelic was to be pushed to the wings, upstaged in favour of the more pressing needs for land reform. The language had thus to look elsewhere for fertile soil in which to sow the seeds of its future. It found that soil in the contemporary proliferation of Highland Gatherings and Games.[96]

Gaelic language and literacy had to take a backseat while the politics of the day were argued over. It therefore fell to these Highland Gatherings and Games to adopt the guardianship of the culture. Signalling the beginning of the interest in the Gaelic spectacle, prizes were awarded for Highland dancing, piping, singing, and for the best

[94] Francis Thompson, *History of An Comunn Gaidhealach: The First Hundred* (Inverness: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1991), p. 7.
[95] Ibid., p.6.
[96] Ibid., p.8.

essay, or song, in Gaelic.[97] In this period of the late nineteenth century, the Highlands were becoming fashionable:

> The prizes themselves, many of them emanating from the Highland Society of London, were evidently potent symbols of cultural regeneration. They were such artefacts as quaichs and dirks and copies of *Ossian's* poems in the original Gaelic. This was, of course, the age of Romanticism, sparked off by James Macpherson, and consolidated by the heavy images derived from Walter Scottery and Balmoralism, the latter fostered by Queen Victoria and her 'beloved Highlanders'. It was also significant that these gatherings were, largely, organised by local gentry, lairds and other 'gentlemen of rank.' In a class-conscious and socially-deferential community, the patronage of the gentry and nobility was regarded as both right and proper, and probably essential for financial success. The Rules of the Argyll Gathering, as laid down in 1871 … reveal that membership was 'restricted generally to Landowners of Argyllshire, their sons and brothers'.[98]

Given the class-based struggles of the nineteenth century in the Highlands, it is perhaps little surprise that these Gatherings and ' … the process of popularising Highland Games was not in fact wholly acceptable to all members of the Highland social structure.'[99] While landlords and other people of suitable rank congratulated feats of strength and took full advantage of their roles as landowners, the people whose culture and language they were celebrating would protest their conditions.[100]

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[97] Gaelic scholars have since criticized this approach to the Gaelic problem. Kenneth Macdonald, for example, notes that *An Comunn* '…has been accused of not taking a sufficiently realistic view of the political, social and economic forces undermining Gaelic society, and of relying too much on over-optimistic and emotionally charged affirmations of the language's immortality. It has been held that the devotion of so much of its organizational energy and finance to the one major event of the National Mod has led to a disproportionate emphasis on Gaelic song, at the expense of the spoken and written word, that the competitive nature of the Mod encourages mere trophy-hunting and little real desire on the part of many competitors either to acquire or use the language.' Kenneth Macdonald, 'The Gaelic Language, Its Study and Development' in *The Future of the Highlands*, ed. by Derick Thomson and Ian Grimble (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 195-196 (p.195).

[98] Thompson, 1991, p.8.

[99] Ibid., p.9.

[100] It should be noted that by the mid twentieth century period, Gaelic scholars were still reluctant to publicly criticize *An Comunn Gaidhealach* though it was common to find the organisation's work damned with faint praise. As John Lorne Campbell, Laird of Canna and scholarly Gaelic learner noted in 1945: 'The various Highland associations such as An Comunn Gaidhealach, the Gaelic Society of Inverness, the Gaelic League of Scotland, etc., do good work in encouraging Gaelic singing and the teaching of Gaelic, and in providing social gatherings with a Gaelic atmosphere; but they represent the activities of Highlanders living in cities, together with non-Gaelic sympathisers, rather than spontaneous movements amongst the rural Gaelic-speaking population of the Highlands and Islands themselves.' John Lorne Campbell of Canna, *Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life, Past, Present and Future* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1945), p.28.

In Wales, the Welsh language had been promoted by the *Eisteddfod*, and this proved to be the model for *An Comunn*. In 1890, a committee was sent to Wales 'to confer with the authorities of the Welsh Eisteddfod to determine how a constitution could be drawn up and, significantly, how financial support for the movement could be generated. The Welsh were only too delighted to help set up an agency for cultural revival in a sister Celtic country.'[101] The minutes of the first meeting recorded its rules and its purpose. As Thompson notes:

1) To promote the cultivation of Gaelic Literature and Music and Home Industries in the Highlands.
2) To encourage the teaching of Gaelic in Highland Schools
3) To hold an Annual Gathering at which competitions shall take place and prizes will be awarded.
4) To publish at intervals a volume of such prize compositions as may be selected by the Executive Council.
5) To raise by means of Members' Subscriptions and of donations a fund which shall enable the Association to carry out these objects.[102]

The Committee was established and its purpose was to be a voice for the hundreds of thousands of Gaels in Scotland. It could represent them and their culture, but most importantly, it had identified that there were people to represent and that there was the need 'for an organisation which could tap into the resources represented by the 230,000 or so Gaelic-speakers in Scotland.'[103] Such an organisation could surely wield influence if it chose to mobilize itself in this way. The Highlands were fashionable, but with little concern for the people, their land and their language. When the Gaels were mobilised behind a cause, as with the Crofters wars of the 1880s, they proved to be an effective militant force. By the late 1920s, *An Comunn* had become a serious voice on Gaelic concerns, and though it was not always

[101] Thompson, 1991, p.9.
[102] Ibid., p.13-14.
[103] Ibid., p.9.

successful, it appeared to stand behind the Gaels. It is not surprising that *An Comunn Gaidhealach* had attracted Fionn Mac Colla's attention by the late 1920s.

In *Independent and Free*, Richard Finlay notes that 'After 1924 the SNL (Scots National League) was the first nationalist group to formulate and implement a policy of separation and independence from the main British political parties, arguing that the existence of English majorities in these groups would mitigate against Scottish interests.'[104] So, although the independence movement had many disparate groups, such as the Scottish Home Rule Association (SHRA), the Scots National League (SNL), the Scottish Party etc., the SNL can be acknowledged as among the first to advocate outright independence. It is interesting to note, in the context of this thesis, that the SNL drew founding support from Gaelic-speaking nationalists, with strong connections to the Highland Land League, and various Gaelic cultural organisations.[105] 'It was hoped that the new organisation (SNL) would provide the necessary impetus required for a Gaelic political and cultural revival in Scotland.'[106] Similarities can be seen between its foundation and that of Sinn Fein in Ireland. Some of its founders such as William Gillies, for example, like many who had joined the Highland Land League, were also committed socialists, and like Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr, supporters of Sinn Fein and the Easter Rising. Marr's position with regard to establishing the Gaelic language and culture 'dominant over the whole of the country'[107] clearly influenced Mac Colla in later years, even though the party had been subsumed by the NPS in 1928, and had by that time moderated its focus on

[104] Richard Finlay, *Independent and Free*, (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1994), p.24.
[105] Ibid., p.30.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid., p. 32. The SNL's interpretation of contemporary politics was, essentially, that 'from the earliest times the English had tried to subjugate the Scots to rule, destroy their culture and economically exploit them' (Finlay, 1994, p.35).

Gaelic under the leadership of Tom Gibson. In any case, the roots of Scottish nationalism are to be found in the fusion of Gaelic cultural nationalism and the radical socialism of this period, a hybrid to which Marr referred as 'Celtic Communism' – it was anti-British and anti-militarist, though Finlay questions this term as an attempt to attract the camp of John MacLean, who shared similar anti-establishment views.[108]

[108] Finlay, 1994, p.38.

Gaelic summer School, Broadford, Skye, 1928. Mac Colla far left.
(Reproduced through the permission of Francesca Hardcastle. Coincidentally, the young girl at the front, third from the right, has been identified as my grandmother).

From Palestine to Skye: Scottish Nationalism in the summer of 1928

The letter which Mac Colla published in *An Gaidheal* was written from the Scots College in Safed, Palestine, where he had taken up a teaching position in 1926. His time in Palestine was to be of enormous influence on his attitude towards politics and the nation: 'My work there taught me something invaluable' he notes. 'It cured me forever…of taking the short-range or narrow view of things in history…giving things, events and trends in history a thousand-year look. That rectified the position

wonderfully.'[109] A new way to appreciate the history of the land around him then, stood out as among his greatest experiences in Palestine. As he writes in an unpublished note on his time there:

> I had in those days, as all through my life, a faculty of warm and immediate imaginative apprehension of history as the express actions of warm, immediate, actual persons. And I was sitting on one of the very spots where the great, determining movements of the early history of man … had taken place. That is to say on the actual ground … along which the armies of succeeding civilizations had marched and counter-marched since the beginning of recorded time (recorded in 'our' part of the world). The point is that in that country one could not raise one's eyes without being reminded of history, one could not turn a stone without touching history. The entire country, air and all, was charged with history. To a young teacher of history nothing could have been more vitalizing: it could have been small wonder if my disposition was to stay there, in such ambiance.[110]

His experiences in Palestine developed not only a deeper understanding of historical contexts, but also developed his religious opinions. Considering that he was essentially a missionary for the United Free Church in Palestine, this is a direction which was perhaps unexpected:

> I had been struck in my teaching in Palestine with the impressive unity which marked the Catholic Church through the ages, its ability to accommodate itself to changes throughout difficult times while remaining manifestly the same thing.[111]

During a return visit to Scotland in the summer of 1928, he attended a Gaelic Summer School being held in Broadford in the Isle of Skye. The school had been arranged by the Education Committee of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* to commence on Thursday 19th July 1928, at a cost of 30 shillings per student.[112] The classes were advertised in *An Gaidheal* as appealing to those: '…interested in the language, literature, art and music

[109] Mac Colla, 1975, p.74.
[110] NLS, dep 265/18
[111] NLS, dep 265/33
[112] Mac Colla is noted as 'Mr. T. Douglas-MacDonald, Scots College, Palestine' as a student of the 'Elementary Class' role, listed in *An Gaidheal*, ('Summer School of Gaelic: Hon. Secretary's Report', *An Gaidheal*, 24.1 (October 1928), pp. 9-10). Three classes were devised: Advanced, Elementary and Beginner. Thus, it is possible to discern that MacColla's command of Gaelic was of a sufficient level to allow for his inclusion in this intermediate class.

of the Highlands' and those sufficiently interested were urged to attend so as not to miss 'this opportunity of increasing their knowledge of these national possessions, and, by cultivating these living expressions of the spirit of our race, help in preserving and developing a distinctive and valuable contribution to Scottish culture.'[113] It clearly appealed to Mac Colla and there was obvious nationalistic sentiment behind it. While attending the Gaelic Summer School, Mac Colla also took the time to develop his interest in nationalist politics, '…immediately [joining] the National Party from Broadford in Skye,' the National Party of Scotland having been formed earlier that year.[114] It was, presumably, no coincidence that the Skye branch of the newly formed National Party of Scotland was operating in the very same town as the nationalistically minded Gaelic summer school, and therefore, this Skye Gaelic Summer School deserves a place in the modern history of the development of Scottish Gaelic and nationalist consciousness.[115]

He had not begun to write *The Albannach*, but the initial promise of the Gaelic Summer School offered an opportunity to associate with those individuals in Scotland who shared his views on the promotion of Gaelic culture and the 'radical' idea that this promotion was of great importance in establishing a clear, alternative historical

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[113] Augusta Lamont, 'Summer School of Gaelic: Opening Date – Thursday, 19th July', *An Gaidheal*, 23.7 (1928), p. 123

[114] Mac Colla, 1975, p.78.

[115] During the 1920s, when Mac Colla first became convinced of the value of Scottish self-government, the nationalist movement was varied and dispersed across groups such as the SNL, The Scottish National Movement and the SHRA. Although the Scottish National Movement is noted by Lynch to have been 'largely a cultural group of Gaelic nationalists who had no clear political strategy or impact' the Scots National League whose members 'had a major impact on the future NPS and the SNP … was established by Gaelic-speaking nationalists in London, many of whom had been involved in the Highland Land League' (See Peter Lynch, *The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff: 2002), pp.27-33). Although these various groups found little agreement outside of the issue of Home Rule, their leaders did communicate with one another, and eventually joined, as the NPS, in 1928, leading to the SNP in 1934. Yet Gaelic speakers with radical political backgrounds were involved in attempting to establish Home Rule in the 1920s. Lynch notes that the SNL 'was a cultural organisation comprised of Gaelic romantics, concerned with the teaching of Scottish history, Scotland's perceived position as a colony of England and the status of the Gaelic language' (Ibid., p.39). The SNL was focused on independence rather than settling for Home Rule, and this body comprised of 'Gaelic romantics' had a large influence on the direction of the independence-focused policy of the NPS, formed in 1928.

identity which could be utilised to push for Scottish independence. Some of these individuals at the Gaelic Summer School in Broadford would make their own contributions to both the Gaelic and the nationalist movement. In an article recounting the success of the summer school, the folklorist and author F. Marian McNeill, describes a number of the individuals in attendance:

> The students were of all ages, conditions, and occupations, and hailed from places as far apart as Shetland and Palestine. Notable amongst the students and visitors were Mrs. Burnley-Campbell, that veteran worker in the Gaelic cause…Rev. Dr. Norman Maclean of Edinburgh, who as befits a Skyeman, has fluent Gaelic…Mr Douglas-Macdonald, from the Scots College in Palestine, who had some interesting things to say about the amazing revival of Hebrew as a spoken language after it had been 'dead' for two thousand years…[116]

Mac Colla's time in Palestine had focussed his ideas on language revival, on history and on politics, and he brought these ideas back to Scotland. It is tempting to view this summer school as an ad-hoc, Gaelic nationalist conference set up to progress the movement, and though discussing the constitutional reform of the union was not its official remit, some of the literature published in anticipation makes it clear that Scottish nationalism was firmly on the agenda. However, *An Comunn* has often incurred the criticism that it has been, in the past, elitist, and not at all concerned with the very real issues facing Gaelic. Not all supporters of the Gaelic cause, for example, were of the opinion that *An Comunn Gaidhealach* was working in the right direction, or that it was able to move the language forward with any noticeable achievement. In a letter to *The Free Man*, dated December 2, 1933, entitled 'A Gaelic Revival', the anonymous contributor (D.M.R.T), writing from Barra, suggests that the Gaelic body must look to other Celtic nations and take their cue from the experiences there.

[116] F. Marian McNeill, 'Summer School of Gaelic', An *Gaidheal*, 23.12 (September 1928), pp. 181-2.

Without a noticeable, visible presence, Gaelic would encounter indifference, if not outright hostility to its plight:

> Sir – Gaelic, like any living language, must fulfil a two-fold purpose – communication and expression. In the first respect Gaelic is and will doubtless remain at a disadvantage – English actually being the far more "useful" tongue for everyday intercourse within the greater part of this country. On the other hand, if the Scottish Celt has retained any national or racial individuality, this will find truer expression in the speech evolved by his ancestor and made to his measure, than in one made to fit the needs of another people …[117]

The Gaelic Summer School provided Mac Colla with a chance to encounter at first-hand the motivators behind the Gaelic movement of the late twenties. It therefore allowed him to realise for the first time perhaps, exactly how the movement, led by *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, should progress, assess what it was lacking, and witness what it unfortunately possessed in harmful abundance. 'Mrs. Burnley-Campbell', for example, 'who brought her piper', or the 'company of Skye players' performing a 'delightful Gaelic opera or ballad-play', regrettably seem to betray the somewhat parochial attitude towards Gaelic and the Highlands which Mac Colla would later disparagingly attribute to *An Comunn Gaidhealach*.

Though these people could not be said to be actively seeking to harm the language, Mac Colla believed that, nevertheless, they were. An example of his attitude to what he saw as the entirely wrong focus of some members in *An Comunn* can be given. In the year between completing *The Albannach* and publication, Mac Colla was engaged writing reviews for *The Modern Scot*, which was owned by his friend, the American J.H Whyte. Reviewing *An Rosarnach* in the January edition of 1931, less than three years after his first encounter with *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, Mac Colla notes: 'For a considerable time now the Gaelic language has been much in need of protection from its friends.' He continues by drawing attention to the support

[117] D.M.R.T., 'A Gaelic Revival?', *The Free Man*, 2 December, 1933, p.2.

which would be needed were Gaelic to survive, attacking many of those concerned with the Gaelic movement, including *An Comunn Gaidhealach* itself:

> With very few exceptions the protagonists of Gaelic revival have consistently been characterised by an almost total lack of imagination, an extreme provincialism of outlook, and a disposition to apologise for themselves and for the language…As a body it [*An Comunn Gaidhealach*] is exclusive, fashionable, offensively "Highland," and very English…It made the initial and fatal error of regarding the Gaelic as a "Highland" language, as a consequence of which it has become hopelessly provincial, concerned only with such relatively insignificant matters as local singing contests, and as was to be expected has not produced anything of the slightest value in the intellectual and aesthetic spheres.[118]

Intellectual Radicalism: Following The Welsh Example?

Although the Welsh language movement was in advance of the Gaelic movement, both faced the same problems. Ned Thomas describes the position of Welsh in a chapter on Welsh Nationalists from his study of language and culture, *The Welsh Extremist*: *A Culture in Crisis* (1971):

> Everywhere in the world you can travel superficially, see things from the outside, repeat the clichés when you come home; but nowhere is this easier than for the Englishman in Wales. He need never be undeceived in his picture of a pastoral landscape, quaint place-names and a strange language overheard in country towns. There will always be people on hand to speak his own language, in a metaphoric as well as a literal sense, people who might have walked off a golf-course in Surrey, who speak with affectionate patronage of the Welsh language, who may occasionally even speak it and wear it as an adornment but be quick to reassure the foreigner that they do not hold with "extremism" … Without access to the language and literature, the Englishman is condemned to have that image reinforced by the quaint externals – trousered *eisteddfod* druids invented in the nineteenth century … This is the sort of synthetic identity that always rises when a minority nation has to make its way in conditions of cultural dominance. The same *ersatz* emblematic approach to nation-hood is found in the Scotland of tartan and haggis. If this is what the other cultures of the British Isles are like, the educated Englishman has every reason to despise them. Certainly, I am not objecting to the Welshman as a music-hall joke; after all, Welsh drama has its stock funny Englishman. But that these should be the only terms in which Welsh culture is understood is a great loss, as if Spain were to be thought of as all castanets and no Lorca.[119]

[118] Fionn Mac Colla, 'An Rosarnach', *The Modern Scot*, January 1931, pp. 72-75. This is the first published use of the pseudonym 'Fionn Mac Colla' that has been identified. It appeared eighteen months before *The Albannach* was published.
[119] Ned Thomas, *The Welsh Extremist* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), pp. 20 – 21.

In *Too Long in this Condition*, Mac Colla recalls that the cultural situation in the Highlands, like the situation in Wales, was always recognised by the political classes when eager for votes: 'I remember all the way from about 1920 a chorus that appeared in 'Forward' purporting to express the indignation of Labour at the treatment of some Skyemen (during land raids):

> 'Then hurrah for the Highlands
> The sport-estate Highlands
> Domain of us nimrods from Piccadillee;
> For these Highland vermin
> Are fast disappearin
> We'll soon have them all in the jail in Portree.'[120]

The Albannach was intended to be a book of protest and to radically contribute to a reversal of unhelpful attitudes, to re-awaken and re-imagine the Gael's concerns in the modern age. It was 'radical' because it presented the Gael in his modern condition for the first time. It was designed to help alter the public's view of Gaelic both in social and artistic terms, and bring it to the full attention of Scotland. Mac Colla was one of those in the Gaelic movement who, far from being satisfied with singing competitions and prizes, wanted the Gaelic language positioned centrally in Scottish society. The language needed to be acknowledged and accepted by the Scottish public for it to survive and progress. His understanding that Gaelic needed to be advanced in 'intellectual and aesthetic spheres' to be taken seriously was both astute and prophetic:

> There was never more need for writers in the language than there is at this moment; and indeed it is probably not too much to say that were one man to arise whose work would command European attention for its own intrinsic merits we should yet on his account alone be assured of winning the day.[121]

While engaged in the attempts to 'modernise' Gaelic in literary and social terms and bring it back to the fore of not just a Highland, but also a *Scottish* consciousness, his

[120] Mac Colla, 1975, p.91.
[121] Mac Colla, 1931, p.75.

own lack of a native and intellectual command of the language restricted him from undertaking the task comprehensively. Nevertheless, Mac Colla's conviction was warranted. The very year that the *Modern Scot* review was published, Sorley Maclean would begin composing the first poem of his *Dàin do Eimhir* sequence.[122] Other authors have discussed the great importance of Maclean's poetry to Gaelic language and culture at length. Some of his themes are similar to Mac Colla's own concerns, in particular their anti-landlord, anti-clerical stance. It is clear, also, that Maclean's own experience of personal, national and cultural history contribute a great deal to his poetry.

Maclean, while concerned with thematic 'Highland' issues was at the same time outward-looking in his concerns and influences, though he disagreed with Mac Colla's notion as to the extent of the influence of the Calvinist doctrines in the Islands. In a letter to Hugh MacDiarmid in 1938, Maclean discusses Mac Colla: 'Perhaps your sojourn in Skye will have lessened your belief in Tom MacDonald's estimate of the hold of Secederism on the people of the west; at least it did not trouble us in Portree.'[123]

[122] Sorley Maclean, *Dàin do Eimhir/Poems To Eimhir*, ed. by Christopher Whyte, (Glasgow: Association for Literary Studies, 2002), p. 155. Whyte notes that the core of poem I from Maclean's *Dàin do Eimhir* sequence 'consists of its three central sections…written in Raasay in August or September 1931.'
[123] Maclean, 2002, p.9.

Modern Gaelic Nationalism

Between 1928 and 1931, Mac Colla engaged in correspondence with the Gaelic teacher and proponent, Annie Johnstone, of Barra, whom he had most likely met in Broadford in 1928.[124] The series of letters written to Mac Colla are almost all entirely in Gaelic, and are addressed to him at various locations including Palestine, Montrose, Inverasdail and the Western Isles, charting his movements during this period. A letter dated 26 October 1928 and addressed to him at Safed, Palestine, begins by exclaiming how free of errors his last letter was, though, to reinforce the notion that he, himself, was incapable at that time of writing literature in Gaelic, there is a page included by Johnstone of simple grammatical terms and Gaelic phrases supplied to help him continue his studies.[125] These letters are an important example of the links that Mac Colla was forging between Gaelic and Scottish nationalism, combining with this a dedication to scholarship which he would come to advocate later in his articles for *The Free Man*.

A letter dated 27 September, 1931, and addressed to him at Blackfriar's Street in Montrose, reveals that he had supplied her with some paragraphs for translation. It is clear that he has asked her what the Gaelic for the 'right-wing of an army' is as she writes: … 'I do not know the technical term in Gaelic for the right-wing of an army. In the account of the battle of Culloden that I read in Gaelic, it said that 'o nach d'fhuair na Domhnullaich urram na laimhe-deise.''[126] However, the most interesting inclusion is a section she has translated for him entitled 'Partaidh Naiseanta na h-Alba' (the National Party of Scotland):

> Is tric a their ir nach eil an Alba ach duthaich bhochd, agus gu bheil a latha seachad. Cha b'urrain facal a bhidh nab'fhaide o'n fhirinn. Cha'n e duthaich bhochd tha'n Alba idir, ach duthaich nach tugadh riamh gu ire. Bho chionn da

[124] Personal correspondence with Francesca Hardcastle, September, 2011.
[125] NLS Dep. 239/2/D.
[126] Translation – 'As the Macdonalds weren't on the right-wing.'

> cheud bliadhna, tha Alba fo riaghladh Shasuinn. Tha i paidheadh tuille ‘ s’ a choir de chisean, tha a cuisean air an leigeil o dhoigh le mi-shuim, agus a cuid sluaigh air a fuadach as an fhearunn. An duigh tha Alba air thuar a dhol a bith a measg nan naiseanan – Cha’n’eil sabhaladh dhi ann mur a faigh i soars gun dail. Ciud e’bhuanachd a gheibheadh na h-eileanan an Iar o Shaorsa na h-Alba? [127]

The letter also includes paragraphs translated into Gaelic concerning the social and economic problems in the Highlands, including demands for a more reliable and cheaper ferry service in the Western Isles, noting that:

> …Ach cha’nurrain do na h-eileanan anns an staid ‘s a’bheil iad aig an latha’ n duigh paidheadh airson a leithid sin de sheirbhis. Se Ard-Riaghladh Albannach a b’urrain a ‘chosdais a sheasamh, agus ‘se an t-ard-riaghaladh sin a bhain a bhiodh deonadh seasamh ris.’[128]

There are various translations in this letter which all concern the Western Isles from a political perspective. This is nationalist propaganda: an attempt to mobilize the Islanders into supporting independence. The words are Gaelic and the sentiment is nationalist. Mac Colla is applying relevant economic and social concerns here, including dairy farming, chicken farming and egg production. There is also reference to fishing – all the agricultural and obvious economic problems in the islands are highlighted and translated into Gaelic for circulation. The last translation reads: ‘Tha Saoghal do dhuthcha ‘nad lamhan. Cuidich Pairtidh Naiseanta na h-Alba agus a’ chuis mhor sin SAORSA ALBA.’ (The future of your nation is in your hands. Help the National Party of Scotland and, that high ideal, SCOTLAND’S FREEDOM).[129] The evidence makes it plain that Mac Colla was trying to activate an independence

[127] NLS Dep. 239/2/D. Translation – It is often said that Scotland is nothing but a poor nation and that her day is finished. No word could be further from the truth. Scotland is not a poor nation, but a nation that has never reached her potential. For over 200 years, Scotland has been ruled by England. She pays more than her share of taxes, her affairs are regarded with indifference, and her people cleared from her soil. Today, Scotland is at risk from being lost among nations. She cannot be saved unless she is freed. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the Western Isles could be freed from Scotland? * This last sentence appears to have been a joke included by Annie Johnstone.

[128] Ibid. Translation – The Islands in their current state cannot afford such a service. Only a Scottish government could afford this, and only a Scottish government would be willing to provide it.

[129] NLS Dep. 239/2/D

movement, in Gaelic, in the islands. A following letter from Johnstone, dated 22 October 1931, confirms Mac Colla's own political ambitions:

> What a disappointment to all of us that you are not coming forward to claim our votes! Mr [S]tone? Says we could have secured most of the Barra votes for you. And now ever so many of us are not going to the poll at all. It is a big mistake on the part of head-quarters to be so coma co-dhiu.[130] Why didn't Col. Ritchie come forward with some of the money he's putting into the 'Scottish Watch' to secure this seat for the nationalist party?[131]

The letters from Annie Johnston highlight Mac Colla's political ambitions, and his work to mobilise the Western Isles into supporting the newly formed National Party of Scotland. The letters also reveal that *An Comunn Gaidhealach* was openly working in Ireland, to support and promote Gaelic teaching in Scotland. Johnstone mentions that having recently met Mrs Burnley Campbell, plans were afoot to hold another summer school in 1929, (this time in Port Ellen), though she also mentions:

> …Gun robh an Comunn Gaidhealach deonach air mise dhol do Eirinn airson mios a 'dh-ionnsachadh a'Mhoidh Dhirich air teagasg Gaidhlig – (the direct method), agus tha an Comunn deonach mo cosdais a phaidheadh.[132]

There are clear links then, between *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, or at least some of its members, and nationalist politics during this period. Certain members were active in promoting a nationalist agenda, and there was co-operation from sister Celtic countries in assisting this agenda from a cultural standpoint. As a community disassociated from centralized, Westminster power, the Islands could be viewed as the natural area to focus a nationalist campaign. If nationalism was to be developed, and independence to follow, it could most likely succeed in a place, and a tongue, alien to the government. The remoteness of the islands, both geographically and linguistically, their essential 'otherness', could be their greatest strength.

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[130] Translation - complacent
[131] NLS Dep. 239/2/D
[132] NLS Dep. 239/2/D Translation – An Comunn Gaidhealach is keen that that I travel to Ireland for a month to learn the 'direct method' for teaching Gaelic, and that they are willing to pay for my costs.

Nationalist politics were being formed and remoulded and the Gaelic language was to become central to this new movement – at least, it would if people like Mac Colla had influence. There was a clear attempt to develop Gaelic as a Scottish, rather than only a Highland, heritage and culture, and also, to mobilise the islands akin to the political militancy seen in the 1880s. It must be remembered that, in keeping with Mac Colla's notion of a historical memory passed down through the generations in 'tones of voice and intonations', there would have been many islanders who were alive during the Crofters Wars of the previous century, and Mac Colla was trying to appeal to them and their descendants in the hope that that fire could be rekindled. The idea that Gaelic could be harnessed as a rallying point for independence and that old Highland/Lowland divisions could be overcome, uniting Scotland under a banner of an inclusive, shared multi-lingual, cultural identity to suit the nationalist agenda was being developed at this time, and was clearly on the Summer School's agenda, as can be seen in an article entitled 'Scottish Home Rule and the Gaelic' written by Augusta Lamont, the secretary for the Summer School, and published in *An Gaidheal* in 1929:

> The Gaels of the Highlands, who have in the past shown such great devotion to causes which they held dear, can be relied on now to support other Scots of varying degrees of Celtic origin, in this re-awakening of a National Ideal in which their own welfare is inseparable from that of Scotland as a whole. In the development of this National Movement we can feel that the language and the music and the art which we love, are not merely traditional remnants of a past to which we cling, but expressions of a living spirit which is looking forward with hope and eagerness to a new page which history is about to unfold.[133]

This passage is forward-looking and optimistic. It focuses on change, and foresees change. This was, after all, a period of radical politics across Europe. Ireland had already achieved independence. Nationalists in Scotland at this time were looking towards a future which was full of possibility. Characteristically, just a few years

[133] Augusta Lamont, 'Scottish Home Rule and the Gaelic', *An Gaidheal*, 24.5, February 1929, p. 77.

later, Mac Colla chose the moment to look hard at the past, and to assess the cost of what had happened in the most recent trauma of Highland history: the Clearances.

Chapter 4: *And the Cock Crew*

An Empathetic and Psychological Response to the Clearances

> 'If our language could play no better part in the modern world than to decorate the process of our national degradation it would become the duty rather of every man of sensibility and real culture to applaud and hasten its extinction.'[1]

Thirteen years after *The Albannach*, and 'after many rejections',[2] Mac Colla's second novel *And the Cock Crew* was published in Glasgow in 1945. It marked a pivotal moment in his career and reputation, and was generally acknowledged in critical terms as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter. It expands the theme of religious interference in Gaelic cultural traditions initiated in *The Albannach* – though *And the Cock Crew* sees a dramatic shift in the tone and complexity of this argument. Mac Colla interrogates historical psychologies and identifies direct influences upon contemporary society through his fiction. *Scottish Noël* is a chapter taken from his posthumously published Reformation novel, *Move Up, John* (1994) and was written in Benbecula in the late 1950s.

> What was it *like*, to live in those days. A desirable ultimate End of the effort towards historical knowledge must be if possible to pass through or beyond, or, more correctly, to go forward *with* the knowledge of the facts, of the circumstances and conditions of people's lives in former times, to an apprehension of the quality of their consciousness of – or simply *in* – those conditions, what the experiences meant, or what they 'tasted like,' to them as they lived it. If it were possible to re-live the past in the company of those who were contemporary with it, that would be true historical understanding...[3]

The work of this later period is obsessively focused on the effects of the Reformation. Mac Colla's writing during this period represents his controversial view of the collaborative effects on Gaelic and Scotland of Reformation and Anglicisation:

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[1] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Cùis na Cànain VI', *The Free Man*, 2 September 1933, p. 6.
[2] Duncan Glen, 'Profile of Mary MacDonald: her life with "Fionn Mac Colla', *Selected Scottish & Other Essays* (Kirkcaldy: Akros, 1999), p.79.
[3] Ibid.

> Most formidable of all the obstacles to the imposition of the doctrinal formulations and even more the essence of the matter, the accompanying negating action of the will, was the Gaelic language...The language therefore which until the Reformation had been referred to as the *lingua maternal* and regarded as the mother tongue of the nation, had as a continuing priority to give place to the English language which was introduced by the Reformers and enforced as the language of the Bible and the Kirk...Had the process of Anglicisation never been introduced and imposed over the whole community, as it would never have been but for the Reformation, the native traditions, which were of long descent and great vitality, instead of being systematically and unceremoniously ushered into the area of the unknown, would have been developed...IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT THE REFORMATION DID WAS TO SNUFF OUT WHAT MUST OTHERWISE HAVE DEVELOPED INTO THE MOST BRILLIANT NATIONAL CULTURE IN HISTORY.[4]

This is Mac Colla's outspoken position with regard to the ultimate fate of Gaelic in Scotland. He argues that, although the Kirk was responsible for maintaining Gaelic to a degree insomuch as it was publishing Gaelic bibles and establishing schools through the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), it opened the door to Anglicisation. He viewed the position of Gaelic in Scotland as being affected by the same 'impositions' which had also facilitated the end of Scottish political independence. Quoting the historian Peter Hume Brown in a section from *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*:

> "*1560 – 1603 – 1707 – these three dates are connected together by the strictest law of cause and effect. Without the Reformation the Union of the Crowns would have been impossible, the Union of the Parliaments unthinkable*." So said the doyen of Scottish historians, the late Hume Brown, and nobody can quarrel with his judgement. The effect of the transvaluation of values and trans-association of concepts brought about by the Reformation was in the end that the Scots, originally the most nationally-conscious and freedom-loving people in Europe, were led on to lose their national status and autonomy, to be reduced from a nation into no more than a backward province in the possession of their traditional enemy, while retaining the illusion that they were still free, and even freer than ever before, since the Protestant religion remained secure in its ascendancy.[5]

This is Mac Colla at his most controversial and uncompromising. The conclusions which dominate the later part of his career are entirely concerned with apportioning

[4] Mac Colla, 1967 p.204,
[5] Ibid., p.192.

blame for the contemporary political and cultural state of the nation to the Reformation and the Anglicisation of Scotland, a move which was removed to some extent from the earlier, affirming message of *The Albannach*. The uncompromising seriousness and intensity of this conflict in his later writing is first noticeable as a significant development in *And the Cock Crew*. His protest at the poor state of Gaelic Scotland in the 1920s, urging a positive reclaiming of cultural identity, had taken the rebellious voice of youth in *The Albannach*. Conversely, *And the Cock Crew* lingers on the tragedy of Gaelic Scotland. Yet the achievement of this work lies in its dramatic tension, characterisation and literary art. It is a novel, not a polemical rant or political satire or essay in philosophy.

Structuring a more serious and emotionally-challenging argument than was attempted in *The Albannach*, Mac Colla concentrates on the government-led dismantling of Gaelic culture and society, examining it from the perspective of characters involved, *as they lived it*. The result is a novel which is defined by the author's channelling of the anxiety which characterises such emotive subject matter. There is no mistaking the sentiment. The Clearances, the assimilation of Gaeldom and Gaelic into the Empire, the defeat of Jacobitism, are all of a process and were actively pursued by the London government. The character of *And the Cock Crew* is one of intensity because it focuses injustice, tragedy and, ultimately, silence. Of the literature extant in the period during which Mac Colla was actively engaged in writing his novels, the only serious study of the Highland Clearances was Alexander Mackenzie's *The History of the Clearances* (1883).[6] Indeed, it could be argued that until Neil Gunn in 1936, and then Mac Colla in 1945 had dramatized the Clearances in novel form, bringing them to the attention of the wider public, very little academic,

[6] Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances* (Inverness: A & W Mackenzie, 1883).

or artistic, literature had been published on this subject.[7] Mac Colla set about to represent the Clearances as a recent period in Scottish history which had had an enormous impact on the contemporary social, cultural and political scene in Scotland, and one of which, he contended, most Scots knew almost nothing outside of the oral tradition.[8]

It is a more subjective novel than *The Albannach* and it can still deeply polarize opinion. The novelist and short-story writer Fred Urquhart questioned why it was included in Murray and Tait's *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (1984): 'I have always found it unreadable…I'm sticking to that opinion. It is overwhelmingly Gaelic…"MacColla had some very strong views, on politics, religion, history and nationalism, and saw no reason to disguise this in his writing." Because of this, *And the Cock Crew* has always struck me as a novel of limited appeal…'[9] Urquhart's attitude with regard to the themes in *And the Cock Crew* and especially its 'overwhelmingly Gaelic' presentation, reflects how what the novel represents is seen in terms of Scottish history. Fifty years after the publication of *The Albannach*, the attitudes and arguments with which Mac Colla was concerned still had the power to divide critics.

Central to the dramatic tension of the novel is the long conversation between the two main characters: Fearchar and Sachairi. Fearchar is a bard and represents the Gaelic world which is the setting for the novel, and is the most obviously

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[7] A striking exception was Sorley Maclean's 'The Poetry of the Clearances' in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* Vol. 38 (1937-41), pp. 293-324.

[8] Mackenzie's book was clearly viewed as an authority on the Clearances, given how heavily it is referenced in Tom Johnston's, *The History of the Working Classes in Scotland* (Glasgow: Forward, 1920), for example, nearly fifty years later, and was in wide circulation during precisely the period when Mac Colla was engaged with *The Albannach* and was considering the theme of his second novel. From its initial publication, it remained the primary source for the Highland Clearances well into the twentieth century and would have been seen as required reading for any student of Highland history and Scottish politics. Mackenzie's book is an exhaustive account of the evictions in Sutherland and across the Highlands and Islands, using anecdotal and written evidence to draw attention to the situation of the period, culminating in the uprisings in Braes and Glendale on Skye in the 1880s.

[9] Fred Urquhart, 'Book Reviews', *The Scottish Review*, 37 (1985), pp. 49-50.

sympathetic of the two. But it is an example of Mac Colla's strengths as a writer that Sachairi, despite being a representation of the ultimate threat to this world, is presented as a man torn between opposing the injustices of man and obeying what he believes is the Will of God.

The meeting between the two is a confrontation between opposing forces outside of the context of Clearance. It is a confrontation between the literary and the oral worlds, between the traditional and the modern. It presents Mac Colla's own position as a Gaelic writer writing in English in the twentieth century, which in turn highlights the ultimate failure of the force behind Fearchar to overcome the threat to any continued Gaelic experience. The confrontation between Sachairi and Fearchar represents the failure of a cause: Fearchar's failure to convince Sachairi is the struggle of Mac Colla's own force to politically convince the Scottish public through his writing. His frustration of energies deliberately corrupts and even rubbishes the earlier positive message of cultural and political independence which had been established in *The Albannach*. Developing ideas which had been established in *The Free Man* articles, it is a bitter political and cultural attack on contemporary Scotland. The confrontation of *And the Cock Crew*, through this evocation of the Highland Clearances, envisions the ultimate defeat of Mac Colla's purpose as a writer, even as a nationalist. The setting and the title of the novel itself allude to unchangeable historical fact: this defeat is foretold. In an ironic inversion, the Calvinist sense of predestination is acknowledged, even while the confrontation at the heart of the novel is fraught with tension. Mac Colla's vision of Scotland seems to enact its own failure, because his history is purist and uncompromising: As Duncan Glen writes: 'He was of

that generation of Scots who had strong beliefs and intellectual commitments which they advocated forcibly – no bland half-way house for them.'[10]

Why then, does Mac Colla argue so forcibly? *And the Cock Crew* is a rejection of compromise. It acknowledges the death of its cause through its subject matter and is not intended to convince in the same way as *The Albannach*. As the quote from the opening of this chapter suggests, there can be only victory or death. The only triumph is Mac Colla's own, as a novelist. This is a novel of such directed intensity that it represents the frustrations of intellectual nationalism and the anger of emotional nationalism simultaneously. Certainly, Gaelic is appropriated for political purposes, but it is given so much weight as a symbol because it is at the centre of Mac Colla's historical position – he writes so forcibly on the subject matter because he is writing as a Gael. In order to convey their tragedy, he must write in English. This novel cannot be written in Gaelic, because the novel is about the death of Gaelic. The failure of Gaelic to survive is inherent in, and embodied by, Mac Colla's art.

The fate of Gaelic and, by proxy, Scotland, is at the centre of this book and permeates everything else in it. As a novelist, Mac Colla treats as catalysts and threats particular moments and characters as they affect Gaelic, and therefore, as they affect Scotland. The result is a presentation of the Highland Clearances which develops the historical and political implications for a cultural system when its native traditions are superseded by an opposing system. In this case, the religion and the culture are fundamentally opposed in many respects, though the conflict between them is only universally recognised when the society – the people, the characters – they both inhabit is threatened. Mac Colla's focus and energies were taken up intensely by the living people of the Scotland he knew, and the characters with whom

[10] Glen, 1999, p.79.

he populated his fiction. He determines a psychological experience from this shared history and conveys what it 'tasted like'; the *blas* of a past reality can be emotionally and psychologically re-established through its recreation in fiction. To empathise with the psychology of the people is what interests Mac Colla as a writer.

And the Cock Crew deals with the multifarious nature of civilisations and human psychology. The key conflict, played out in two characters, is the conflict at the heart of Scottish society over five hundred years. It is, Mac Colla believed, this conflict which ultimately provoked the Clearances and the final conquest of Scotland. It is a primal, psychological, conflict which forms the dramatic structure and narrative tension of *And the Cock Crew* and with which this chapter is concerned.

Fire in the Blood: The Purpose Behind *And the Cock Crew*

The optimistic and vibrant tone with which *The Albannach* concludes makes way in this second novel for an altogether fiercer concentration of Mac Colla's powers. In *The Albannach*, Murdo Anderson's initially flippant and frequently misguided anger is ushered towards its more optimistic settlement through an urgency which embodies and stresses the contemporary Gaelic situation. In *And the Cock Crew*, any elements of pastiche, or comedic critique of contemporary Gaelic societies would be wholly foreign – its tone sears as it exposes the brutality of recent Highland history. Man is entirely at fault in *And the Cock Crew*, regardless of religious truths, non-truths or persuasions, and much is concluded through Mac Colla's examination of the psyches which gather the death of a culture through both action and inaction.

And the Cock Crew presents a balance between psychological allegory and historical narrative, examining why the Highlanders did not resist the evictions. Mac Colla gives psychological reasons for this, engaging directly with the psychological

damage done to the community by Calvinism.[11] The contrast can be neatly highlighted by the respective authors' characters. Mac Colla's people in *And the Cock Crew* have no faith in hierarchy – they are defeated, while Gunn's in *Butcher's Broom* (1936) appear to be deluded in their reliance on historical Gaelic traditions and society. There are similarities between these two novels, though, which are significant. Both conclude with no hope, no regeneration for the Gaelic communities in which they are set, the implication being that the Clearances destroyed the Highlands. This fatalism was being held up as an example to the contemporary period in Scottish politics. Contemporary parallels can also be found in the wider European context with the treatment of Jews in Germany and across the continent. Mac Colla's depiction of the Factor and his delight in cruelty, his hatred for the Gaels parallels fascist attitudes in contemporary Europe. Indeed, there may well be extensive comparisons and contrasts to be made between Mac Colla's work and fictional representations of extreme politics across Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, but space does not permit further exploration of these themes here.

The novel is presented as a psychological tragedy: it is the mental breakdown of a community – but it is at once more than that. It has been noted in the present work that Mac Colla was often beset by strident opposition to his subject matter, but he also found it difficult to find the support of willing publishers. By all accounts, the entire experience of *And the Cock Crew* was tightly wrought, with the composition itself particularly intolerable, and Mac Colla has indeed suggested that much of the intensity of its tone was unintentionally directed from his own difficult experiences while writing it.

[11] Johnston notes that: 'The Clergy taught…insistently that the evictions were ordained **by** God as punishment for sin and that opposition to a 'divine' decree was unpardonable sacrilege' (Johnston, 1920, p.189).

As is discussed in chapter one, while still engaged in writing *The Albannach*, Mac Colla had discreetly stated his intention to compose a dramatic, historical, novel about the Clearances, the lasting effects of which he felt were not adequately understood by the majority of people, even in Scotland.[12] The Clearances were a period of defeat for Gaelic Scotland and were portrayed as such both by Neil Gunn and Mac Colla. In the contemporary context of the 1930s, the Clearances are portrayed as a relatively 'recent' example and symptom of the continued decline of the Scottish condition. Yet, the Clearances had already passed into the mythology of the Highlands.[13] By the time Mac Colla's *And the Cock Crew* finally appeared in 1945, Gunn's *Butcher's Broom* (1934) had been in print for over a decade, though this should not be taken to mean that the Clearances were by that time a common preoccupation of Scottish novelists, despite J.M. Reid noting that by this time the Clearances had 'become a favoured subject by a number of authors.'[14]

Although it is significant that both Gunn and Mac Colla, as 'novelists of the Highlands', tackled the Clearances, it should be noted that there are significant differences in their approaches. Religion, as just one example, plays a major role in Mac Colla's novel. What should be considered is that Gunn's and Mac Colla's novels on the Clearances were not a 'rediscovery' of this 'mythology' but a contribution to the political zeitgeist of the 1930s. The Clearances had not been a subject of the 'Celtic Twilight' writers for example. Rather, it can be argued that by the 1930s, Gunn and Mac Colla were examining the history of the contemporary decline in the Highlands, and this was being traced back to the Clearances as a manifestation of the politicisation of Scottish literature, and historical understanding during this period. It must be remembered that the Clearances were not a subject which was being seriously discussed to any extent in the literature of this period, but the tumultuous political mood of the time was propitious.

Margery Palmer McCulloch notes that Gunn does not portray the period in the run up to the Clearances realistically, choosing instead to use historical research to present Gaelic 'traditions'. Gunn demonstrates a socialist concern, while Mac Colla

[12] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p.24.
[13] McCulloch, Margery, *The Novels of Neil Gunn: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p.45.
[14] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p.27.

maintains a more psychological approach.[15] *Butcher's Broom* seems more 'idealised' and 'metaphorical' while Mac Colla's picture is fearful and brutal.

Mac Colla's writing is constantly reinforcing the edification of his readership, and he wrote novels intended to educate to a greater extent than they are intended, necessarily, to entertain. Criticism of his work has developed around this point; namely that his argumentative and laboriously informative style detracts from the artistry of his later novels most especially, on which John Herdman has commented in 'Fionn Mac Colla: Art and Ideas', in *Cencrastus*, (1983):

> One may conclude that Mac Colla's very fine achievement as a novelist was limited by a devaluation of his own necessary creative subjectivity, indeed of subjectivity itself, so that he felt obliged to dress it up as objectivity. That it was which again and again prompted him to insert long passages of abstract argument into the body of his narratives, instead of relying on his magnificent novelistic talents for the *enactment* of his meaning.[16]

Mac Colla's focus is indeed noticeably altered in the novels that follow *And the Cock Crew*, and Herdman's comments apply to them. Like other critics who examine Mac Colla's novels, including Herdman, Douglas Gifford is less critical with regard to *And the Cock Crew* itself, and the analysis which follows (a review of the 1977 edition) is useful as a comparison with Herdman's later piece:

> Critics may argue that his central characters lack roundness, that the polemic outweighs the achievement in creating convincing scene and character; but I feel that Mac Colla has succeeded in making argument itself sufficiently powerful and symbolic to carry the aesthetic force necessary for this to be called a novel rather than a tract disguised as a novel.[17]

Gifford is evidently defending Mac Colla's work in *And the Cock Crew* against wider criticism which was clearly in place by the late 1970s – indeed he feels the need to specifically state that *And the Cock Crew* is not a 'tract disguised as a novel'. By the

[15] McCulloch, 1987, p. 52.
[16] John Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', *Cencrastus*, 13 (1983), pp. 11-13.
[17] Douglas Gifford, 'Modern Scottish Fiction', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 13 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1978), 250-273, (p.256).

time of Herdman's own analysis of Mac Colla's 'Art and Ideas' five years later, notably, after the publication of *The Ministers* in 1979, it was generally established that, as a novelist, Mac Colla had diverged from his early promise.[18] The focus of, and the approach of, his later work has to the present day come to dominate his reputation as a writer. A comparison with the generally positive reviews, which followed the publication of *And the Cock Crew*, clearly demonstrates this divergence.[19]

Mac Colla's novels present political ideas which are intended not just *for* effect, but to *have* effect. It is because of this purpose, then, regardless of the particular cause, that his art is occasionally considered compromised. Through his long analyses of the state of Scottish cultural and political independence, his work stands as an authentic attempt to convince his readers. This was a genuine conviction which spanned both life and career. When, for example, he recounts the intentions of his proposed land-raid on the Isle of Rum, noted in chapter two, he states: '*My object was to let the large world know about the Clearances, that long-continued genocidal episode, about which nobody at that time had heard apart from a few amateur antiquarians*.'[20]

The Clearances were the crucial event in modern Scottish history. Mac Colla attempts to elevate them to a position of European, if not universal, importance. 'The Clearances', both as historical fact and as imaginative myth, is a phrase that continues

[18] See Iain Crichton Smith, 'A Visionary and his Enemies', *Glasgow Herald*, 26 April 1979, p.8. 'Even more than the two works by which he is chiefly known … it is concerned with debate and argument … It is … frightening precisely because it is to a great extent conducted on the level of the idea and that not wholly among the uneducated. It is a sustained attack on a certain kind of extreme Scottish religion, a village inferno.'

[19] Letters to Mac Colla after the publication of *And the Cock Crew* demonstrate its reception among literary circles. Nan Shepherd wrote that '… this book is magnificent – stronger and surer than the other. A live thing.' George MacGregor writes: I have been so impressed … that I cannot restrain myself from writing to you to express my deep admiration of that very remarkable novel.' William Montgomerie: 'I mentioned that I put your new novel along with Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* as the two finest modern Scottish novels.' See NLS, box 1, A.

[20] Mac Colla, 1975, p.90.

to carry huge resonance in Gaelic Scotland and is still relevant to Gaels and to many non Gaelic-speaking Scots in Scotland and throughout the world. It is a subject for literary exploration as witnessed through notable writers like Neil Gunn and Iain Crichton Smith. Even outside of Gaelic Scotland the impact of the Clearances on Gaelic culture is notable in works by Alistair Macleod in Canada and Les Murray in Australia and James K. Baxter in New Zealand. The injustices are, for many, still considered an unfinished issue. Mac Colla felt the Clearances and their effects very keenly – Gaelic anger and sense of injustice was palpable during his early life. For Mac Colla, the effects of the Clearances were present in Scotland, but writing about them was *necessary* because he experienced them as part of his own personal history. '*And the Cock Crew*…was not written in response to a fashionable interest in a newly-discovered historic-political cause. The Clearances were for Mac Colla the subject of a longstanding and deeply-felt personal obsession.'[21] Mac Colla noted: 'Perhaps some of my personal agony may have passed into *And the Cock Crew* and contributed to its poignancy. But in general the [personal] privations and humiliations of all those years were simply bad. It was useless suffering. It diminished me.'[22] As with *The Albannach*, he was concerned with the development of a 'genuine' experience or portrayal of his subject matter, but tackling the Clearances in this fashion clearly created its own difficulties.

And the Cock Crew is intended not only to draw attention to the Clearances as an event, but also to stress the crucial political and psychological framework behind them. Given the intense political focus of Mac Colla's life and work, the arguments in this book must also be viewed in their contemporary contexts as they applied to Scotland in the first half of the twentieth century. Calvinism may be described as a

[21] John Herdman in Mac Colla, *And the Cock Crew* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1945; rep. 1995), vii.
[22] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p.25.

subject of this novel because its protagonist is a minister and is obsessed with ideas of Predestination and The Elect; therefore the psychological and political arguments made in the book are linked to the Reformation. However, as this reassessment asserts, the Reformation and its Calvinist legacy in Scotland is not the fundamental concern of *And the Cock Crew*. Mac Colla's concern as a novelist is the human psychology, motivation and action of the character of Sachairi, rather than the historical panorama of Scotland since the Reformation.

Contributing to this psychological focus, the effect of the Reformation in Scotland is represented through the Highland Clearances and their effect on Gaelic culture. From a clearly adversarial perspective, the Calvinistic system of 'The Elect' as Mac Colla saw it, had authorised a separation or segregation of mankind's unity. Inherent ideas of chastisement focused on the brutality of human nature. Mac Colla rejects this on that basis that it is a supremely negative basic belief system: conversely, he supported what he considered to be a more didactic Catholic approach to thought through art and ideas of society (though he doesn't make *direct* reference to this in his novels).

Mac Colla acknowledged aspects of Jaques Maritain's philosophical engagement with economics and politics in *Scotland's Share of Guilt*, and again in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* and it is clear in his novels too, that Mac Colla was engaged with Maritain.[23] Caird has also recognised the influence of Maritain's philosophy on Mac Colla's writing in 'Fionn Mac Colla – The Twofold Heritage', demonstrating that Maritain's concept of 'being' can be extended beyond what Mac Colla wrote directly about the French philosopher. Caird writes that '…Whereas the main influences on Gunn's outlook and style of writing were Freud, Jung and Proust,

[23] Mac Colla, 1965, p.174.

and the philosophy he appears to find most congenial is a form of Buddhism, Mac Colla's outlook was affected at a comparatively early age by his reading of the neo-Thomist, Jaques Maritain, and, through him, of St. Thomas Aquinas, and … Duns Scotus.' Mac Colla claims that he recognised the effects of contemplation on the soul: 'I knew from a very early age that that was my own ideal, the "silence" in the spirit used to descend on me constantly so far as I have any memory; and that it was the highest ideal; that the Divine Ground of being was only to be directly approached, and apprehended, by this "way" through contemplation …'[24] The 'Divine Ground of being', then, came through a revaluation of the senses. As he writes in his autobiography, he became preoccupied with such notions as a young man: 'What kind of information do our sense organs give us about the external world? Is it reliable information? Are physical objects really 'out there' and are they revealed to us by our senses exactly as they are? Or – crucial question – are they not dependent for their existence upon our perception of them?'[25] Maritian's influential work *Frontieres de la Poesie* (1935)[26] examined such concepts of being through the definition of poetry. 'Just as God makes created participations of His essence to exist outside Himself, so the artist puts himself – not what he sees, but what he is – into what he makes', writes Maritain.[27] As an artist, Mac Colla's work relates to Maritain's examination of self-awareness. However, parallels can also be drawn to Mac Colla's conversion, and how he linked this to the force he beheld in the Gaelic language, and its position within a concept of 'being' and 'unity'. 'What it makes must resemble, not the material appearance of things, but…hidden meanings whose iris God alone sees glittering on the neck of his creatures – and by that very fact it will also resemble the created mind

[24] Mac Colla, 1975, p.40.
[25]Ibid., p.69.

[27] Jaques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), p.126.

which in its own manner discerned that invisible colour. Resemblance, yes, but a *spiritual resemblance*. Realism, if you will, but a realism of the super-real.'[28] Maritain's attempt to define things that are 'more real than reality' leads him to discuss poetry as spirituality in an interpreted and creative form. While metaphysics merely 'snatches at the spiritual in an idea…poetry reaches it in the flesh'.[29] 'Metaphysics isolates mystery in order to know it; poetry, thanks to the balances it constructs, handles and utilises mystery as an unknown force'.[30] Mac Colla, most especially, perhaps, in *And the Cock Crew*, presents 'being' in these terms. Maritian continues, that 'You can receive the little shock by which it makes its presence known, which suddenly makes the distances recede and unfurls the horizon of the heart.'[31] Mac Colla inhabits this world, in which this spirituality, poetry, is perceived through 'intellectual contribution' to the divine which already exists. Mac Colla's descriptive prose attempts to recognise this existential intensity – the removal of the author himself, to the greatest degree to which this is possible in literature – and the world he presents is not one, he would contend, which he, or his characters, have created.

When Sachairi dies in *And the Cock Crew*, he revisits his life as a young man. The proto-existential intensity of Mac Colla's descriptive prose presents to us a reality which is, indeed, 'more real than reality' as Sachairi finds himself in his childhood home. It exists, unchanged, outside of the sidereal universe. Although it is difficult for Sachairi to comprehend, this world '*exists*' and his perception of it, finally, on his death-bed, removes all need for metaphysical 'tools' of investigation. In 'being' there, Sachairi's perception is cleansed and the world is finally revealed to him

[28] Ibid., p.127-8.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. p.129.

without the barrier of his 'self'. Reality is, at once, a beautiful and terrifying recognition. 'Somehow it increased his fear wonderfully to find everything exactly as it had been, in the house. When he stood a little while in the living room and nothing took place, no sudden awful thing, he became even more afraid. He went and stood right in front of his father, where he was BOUND to notice him. His father gave him no more than a half-glance, half-said his name, abstractedly, and went on reading…'[32] In death, Sachairi is finally able to view the reality of being which his intellectualised doctrines had prevented him from *knowing*. There is an existential freedom in this recognition, but the 'little shock by which *it* makes *its* presence known, which suddenly makes the distances recede and unfurls the heart' is a sorrowful realisation for one who has kept his mind from it in life.

Mac Colla's descriptive prose, then, presents a spiritual self-awareness. Murdo Anderson, the poet, makes a leap towards this self-awareness after reading 'Turas a' Chriosdaidh', a Gaelic translation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*: 'So with himself, he had been torturing himself all these years with a shadow, a mere semblance of reality! And this knowledge had been in existence all the time yet he had never thought of it! What an amadan! It is extraordinary how a man will trouble himself about a thing for years when a simple idea, if it only occurred to him, would solve the problem in the twinkle of an eye.'[33] It is this sense of transcendence and unity which Mac Colla found in Catholicism – a spirituality which exists independently of Man was linked through the 'yea' affirmations presented through Murdo Anderson to the Gaelic language and culture. [34]

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[32] Mac Colla, 1995, p.176.
[33] Ibid., p.144-5.
[34] *Pilgrim's Progress* is a Protestant text. Mac Colla is arguing that this spirituality is raised above doctrines. For Anderson, and for Mac Colla, this spiritual self-awareness and revaluation can be found in Gaelic. It is no coincidence that it is a Gaelic translation of the book that Murdo reads, and it should also be noted that while Mac Colla referred to himself as a 'Pilgrim of Truth' in *Mein Bumpf*, Maighstir

Mac Colla's opposition to the fundamental Presbyterianism with which he had grown up emphatically influenced his adherence to this philosophical stance. The following represents Mac Colla as a writer with faith, but at odds with what he considered to be any system which 'negates man':

> Reformation Protestantism was not Christianity or even a form of Christianity, but its almost complete antithesis. Its affiliations are not with Christianity in its historic form, unceasingly at war with the very spirit that produced such life-negating doctrines, but with Communism of the present day. Communism is another system which negates man, and does not respect his freedom. Communism defies not man but the Social Collectivity, regarded as the totality of those who are indoctrinated with Communism. Instead of bringing man freedom Communism *liberates negating wills into membership of a Dictatorship of Negators.*[35]

'A Dictatorship of Negators', does not confine its influence to religion. As Mac Colla has it, Communism replaces God with man and Calvinism effectively removes God from the earth. Arguments for or against a supreme power aside, in each instance man degrades humanity through subjugation and segregation. Mac Colla believed that those he termed 'Negators' were possessed of a psychological attitude which was fundamentally in opposition to unified societal and political systems, and which was ultimately destructive in nature:

> …The first lesson to learn after the nonsense of 'Progress' is that *history can be changed not only by great men but, according to circumstances, by what I should call Gnyaffs and what [an] escaped Russian [journalist] called tenth-rate bums.* (One can be sure of that, if only because of the way the Gnyaffs and tenth-rate bums rush to their defence: they never do that for really great men; they denigrate them, try to diminish them.) … There have been in history truly great men, and sometimes they have affected the course of history, always for the better … but there have also been alas men of grossly inferior talents though great ambition acting throughout in the interests of their own inferior 'self' … In the great struggle of Man to possess his world, they have seen to it that victory is likely to go to the Gnyaff. They as much if not more than anyone have seen to it that the 'tenth-rate' bums have inherited the earth. And the tenth-rate bums can do nothing with it except destroy it … humanity

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Sachairi's full name is Sachairi Wiseman, Wiseman being the name of the good atheist who tempts Christian in Bunyan's text.

[35] Mac Colla, 1984, III.

> in our times has not answered *Yea* to the infinite range of human potentiality and achievement in the glory of creativity, not *Yea* to everything fine, high, noble, distinguished, magnificent; to intellectuality, contemplation, mystical knowledge; to God as reality not concept, to Beauty as Truth, Truth as Beauty, etc., etc. Not *Yea* to all of it, but *Nay.* And *Nay* means Nothing, for it is a vote for non-existence. And Nothing, by all the signs, is what humanity is about to inherit.[36]

Mac Colla proposes that the Clearances were a symptom of a split in the Scottish psyche – the explosive reaction from the conflict of Calvinism and Gaelic. The ultimate tragedy of the Clearances is that they represent the ultimate failure of mankind. They are man's destruction of mankind's creation and mankind's expression. In this respect, the Clearances are relevant in a universal context.

Tones of Voice and Intonations: Protecting Silence

To determine psychology through the historical novel, it is necessary to regard the characters of the period. Hindsight is invariably in this. Foreknowledge of the established outcome of historical events, for the reader, contributes to the psychological intensity of *And the Cock Crew*. Such consideration anguished a man of Mac Colla's faith, maintaining that he 'felt' and understood the loss which the Clearances had meant:

> Mac Colla was to reflect more than once on the 'agony of the spirit' which, along with his 'desperate condition of health', rendered the composition of his second novel such a morally crushing task. 'And not the least of my sufferings', he writes, 'came from the constant presence in consciousness of a realisation, ranging from the metaphysical to the immediately imagined actual, of what the Clearances had meant. *Really* meant, especially to those who suffered them.'[37]

In *And the Cock Crew*, this approach is demonstrated in the long discussion between Fearchar and Maighstir Sachairi when the main themes of the novel are debated and

[36] Mac Colla, 1975, p.43.
[37] Herdman in Mac Colla, 1995, vii.

the psychological make-up and motivations of the two men are pitted, but Mac Colla absorbed the philosophy behind 'knowing' the psychological truths of historical events in a very personal sense, and he expanded on this in his letters and notes. Seven years before his death in 1975, he ponders his own place in this philosophy:

> … Looking at the vast empty hills all about, emptiness you could almost hear … na daoine a dh'fhalbh, daoine a b'fhabhaist a bhi ann[38] – my enormously strong sense of their life gave me an equally augmented sense of my own: I am not simply man but Man. We are in a true sense members of one another. Not only of all those who are but also of all those who were …[39]

Sorley Maclean was sceptical of 'the Scottish writers who seemed to attribute most of Scotland's ills to Calvinism', and his own personal politics differed from those of Mac Colla, but the 'augmented sense' of self in relation to the geography of the Highlands affected him, and his writing, too: 'I think Mull had much to do with my poetry: its physical beauty, so different from Skye's, with the terrible imprint of the Clearances everywhere on it, made it almost intolerable for a Gael, especially for one with the proud name MacLean.'[40] In Maclean's great poem 'Hallaig' (1954) the metaphysical human imprint of the Gaels lingers in place of their community. Their presence inhabits inherited memories and values, as witnessed by the narrator.

'Hallaig' is a powerful resonance of what Mac Colla also felt, as he explains in his personal notes. There is literally a 'resonance' of these people in Mac Colla's memory as he senses them and can hear their sounds and their voices. Through the descendants, or the memory of, or the ghostly presence of the very people who had experienced the Clearances, the generations of Gaels that follow them experience that resonance:

> From the Burn of Fearns to the raised beach
> That is clear in the mystery of the hills,
> There is only the congregation of the girls

[38] 'The people who left, people who used to be there'.
[39] NLS Dep 239/12/f 'Notes on Gaelic'.
[40] Sorley MacLean, *Ris A' Bhruthaich*, ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), p.12.

Keeping up the endless walk,

Coming back to Hallaig in the evening,
In the dumb living twilight,
Filling the steep slopes,
Their laughter a mist in my ears,

And their beauty a film on my heart …[41]

'I remember my father's voice – I can still hear my father's voice' Mac Colla notes: '… the tone of voice conveying the essence of the reality of a past event…the intonation…everything else deriving from the essence of it…would be transmitted down the line, down the generations, in tones of voice and intonations.'[42] Mac Colla's is an angry voice, but in 'Hallaig' Maclean describes the life which is in the silence. The narrator of 'Hallaig' is listening and watching; silence stands in place of the people who are gone, it does not erase them or their memory. MacDiarmid's 'The Glen of Silence' (1938) places particular emphasis on this idea:

Where have I 'heard' a silence before
Like this that only a lone bird's cries
And the sound of a brawling burn today
Serve in this desolate glen but to emphasize?[43]

The theologian and author Karen Armstrong writes that 'Religious people are always talking about God and it is important that they do so. But they also need to know when to fall silent.'[44] There are always limits to language. Silence cannot express Mac Colla's anger, but it is these contemplations which demonstrate why, and where, this anger exists. 'Coronach for the End of The World' by Hugh MacDiarmid, was initially dedicated to Fionn Mac Colla and in it, the voice of protest is contextualised as the instrument of action:

[41] Sorley MacLean, 'Hallaig', *O Choille gu Bearradh/From Wood to Ridge* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989) pp. 226-7
[42] NLS Dep 265/46.
[43] Hugh MacDiarmid, *Selected Poetry*, ed. by Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), p.177.
[44] Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.124.

Mony a piper has played himsel'
Through battle and into daith
And a piper'll rise to the occasion still
When the warld is brakin' faith!

A trumpet may soond or harps may be heard
Or celestial voices sweet,
But wi' nocht but the cry o' the Pipes can Earth
Or these – or silence – meet. [45]

Mac Colla is so fierce, so intense, so angry, because he *defends* a resonating silence. MacDiarmid, again, this time in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), contemplates silence as the final resonance of anything which man can create or possess:

Yet hae I Silence left, the croon o aa / …Him, whom nocht in man or Deity, / Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch, / Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much. / O I hae Silence left…[46] This demonstrates the complexity at the heart of Mac Colla's writing. It is motivated through loss and the need to protect.

The State of the Language

In the year's hiatus between publishing *The Albannach* and beginning *And the Cock Crew*,[47] ideas on history and politics that would make up a substantial part of the conversation between the characters of Fearchar and Sachairi were given the freedom to develop in a series of articles in *The Free Man*. Entitled 'Cùis na Cànain', the articles appeared almost weekly from July 22 1933, until October 28 1933, and

[45] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Coronach for the End of the World', *Scottish Educational Journal*, 27 October 1933, p. 1245. See also Ruth McQuillan, 'Hugh MacDiarmid's "On a Raised Beach"', *Akros*, 12.34-35 (1977), 89-97, (p.97).
[46] Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926)* in *Selected Poetry* ed. by A. Riach and M Grieve, (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004), 24-114, (p.113).
[47] Herdman in Mac Colla, 1995, vii-viii .
Herdman notes that Mac Colla began *And the Cock Crew* in 1934, at George Scott-Moncrieff's cottage near Peebles. Work was interrupted after he became ill with a "generalised, severe malaise", and again by a job with the New University Society, and yet again by the outbreak of war in 1939. "He tells how the final chapter was written with his left hand while he held the right immersed in hot water on account of a poisoned finger." No account is given as to the cause of his injury.

comprised fourteen 'chapters' detailing the contemporary states of Gaelic and of Scotland, all the while arguing for independence through an examination of 'Celtic' and 'Teutonic' relations throughout Scotland's history.[48] Mac Colla stated the nationalist case from the very beginning of the series: '…Let us put first things first, and refusing to be turned aside towards anything secondary or less essential, concentrate meantime upon obtaining a full measure of political independence.'[49]

Mac Colla's arguments for independence inculcate society's components: cultural, political, artistic, psychological, financial, economic, historical and educational. As is clear in the 'Cùis na Cànain' series, these were ideas which made up much of the literary discourse of the 1930s. Such societal components are not 'secondary' but essential in this context of nationalism and independence. These, Mac Colla argues in *The Free Man*, are the components which have been manipulated in order to obstruct independence and which must be opposed in their corrupted forms and reclaimed. As *The Free Man* articles demonstrate, he was convinced by the intellectual arguments for Scottish independence and his commitment to nationalism was animated not simply by a desire to see Scotland achieve political independence for its own sake, but through his defined intellectual opposition to the cultural and societal distortions of the Union. In 'Cùis na Cànain', these are traced to the cultural distortions of Celtic history; such distortions, he explains, have directed Scotland's course and continue to command every sphere of her political situation. In 'Cùis na Cànain IV', for example:

> For so long it has been arranged that look where we would we should always find the Teuton posing in the foreground of history – whether under the style of the Anglo-Saxon, the German or the Norseman – that it would be a great wonder if the majority had not ended by becoming familiar with the distortion to the extent of taking it for the truth.[50]

[48] The Gaelic phrase means, 'state' or 'progress' of the language.
[49] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Cùis na Cànain I', *The Free Man*, 22 July 1933, p. 6.
[50] Fionn Mac Colla,'Cùis na Cànain IV', *The Free Man*, 19 Aug 1933, p. 4.

It is this particular nationalist stance which was reproduced in *And the Cock Crew* with the character of Fearchar speaking with Mac Colla's voice and articulating the view that Scotland has been continuously under threat through '…the larger nation…trying to conquer and bring into subjugation that one that is smaller.'[51] This is no less than the core of the textured philosophy behind *And the Cock Crew*. Undoubtedly, it is from this series of articles that the long dialogue between Fearchar and Sachairi was initially conceived; they are the most extensive examples of Mac Colla's engagement with these issues before *And the Cock Crew* was written, and though this dialogue will be examined later, it is valuable to look at them first, to demonstrate that for Mac Colla, there were *continuously* contemporary issues. The central relationship in the articles is between linguistic and political independence. Because these articles remain relatively unknown, I have quoted from them quite extensively in the discussion that follows.

Cùis na Cànain

The first in the series, 'Cùis na Cànain I' sets the tone for the rest. Mac Colla stresses the importance of the intellectual side of nationalism when he writes: 'It would be very desirable...and our political action itself might well benefit from it – in the adequacy of its background if not in intensity – should those who are contending in the cause of Scotland possess a wider appreciation than they do of all that is involved in a nationalist movement such as ours...'[52] In the 'Cùis na Cànain'articles, Mac Colla wished to galvanise the nationalist movement through intelligent debate, however rhetorical, and the utilisation of historical and cultural fact. It concerned him

[51] Mac Colla, 1995, p.118.
[52] Mac Colla, 22 July 1933, p.6.

greatly that nationalism in its contemporary form appeared to take little interest in what he considered to be the most integral element of the struggle: the issue of language and cultural independence, and how a misrepresentation of both could prove troublesome. He was all too aware, however, of the dangers that a reactionary nationalism could provoke. Given the period in which he was writing, this was a serious matter:

> The danger is that we should be led into replacing him [the Teuton] with the Celt, which would simply mean substituting one distortion for another. We must take pains to guard against that; it would be all too easy in the course of our protest to fall into an exaggerated racialism on our own account, which would do nobody any good. The stupidities of Nazi-ism may be forgiven the hysterical Germans, who are probably due anyhow to share with their relatives the English a period of eclipse, but if Scotland is to exert a constructive influence on the immediate future of humanity her action must be positive and tend towards order, and such action presupposes an essential balance of ideas in the directing mind. Let us have done with unhistorical racial excesses.[53]

The nationalism which Mac Colla promoted was tied up with culture and language, but it was not expansionist, imperialist or violent – these were the very things so characteristic of the Empire which he opposed. In order to establish a politically independent Scotland, it would need to be independent culturally. The National Party of Scotland, Mac Colla felt, was not adequately promoting full independence, but rather, was focusing on establishing another England called Scotland. What Mac Colla wanted was a nation that would not simply continue as it had been; he argued that a full cultural revolution was the only way in which Scotland could possibly be fully independent. Whether or not he seriously believed that by the 1930s, this could ever happen, can only be surmised. His own biography may suggest that early hope and idealism gave way to disappointment and bitterness. This is also reflected in his novels.

[53] 'Cuis na Canain VII' in *The Free Man*, 9 September 1933, p.6.

The ‘Cùis na Cànain’ series spends a great deal of time dealing with the historical background of the Celts in Europe before moving on to focus on the situation of Gaelic in contemporary Scotland. Mac Colla emphasises that it is a fundamental requirement to be able to understand history in context with contemporary circumstances:

> Those readers who by reason of the ardour of their national sentiment, or merely out of curiosity, have taken the trouble to discover what is meant by the words ‘Cùis na Cànain’ may have begun to wonder by now what all this has got to do with language. But it was necessary to make so long an excursion into the past in order to establish the minimum of historical background which everyone ought to possess before approaching the consideration of language at all.[54]

Language is the focus of this series. Understanding historical events, and the people engaged in those events, became vital to understanding the fate and history of the Gaelic language. This would be a way to argue for the political independence which could defend the individuality which the language created.

‘Cùis na Cànain’, like much of Mac Colla’s work at this time, blends the issues of nationalism and Gaelic, but he understood that this would likely be opposed, even within the nationalist movement. The purpose of his work seems simple: to engage the intellectual side of the debate in order to win the argument. He believed that those who opposed his ideas could, intellectually, be proved wrong and that this must reveal a psychological opposition rather than an intellectual one, an opposition of disposition or temperament – of character rather than of logic. He applies the same logic to language as a representation and a mediator of character: ‘…Aristotle once said that those who do not themselves know geometry are handicapped in discussing the subject, and I would respectfully suggest to those concerned that they defer judgment on the Gaelic language until they learn a little about it, for there is

[54] Mac Colla, 9 September, 1933, p.6.

something a trifle excessive in holding strong opinions about something of which one is entirely ignorant.'[55]

For Mac Colla, the issues facing Scottish culture and political independence were perennial: 'Language is the very crux of the whole matter' he writes in the first instalment:

> The language is the test, the final test whether we are nationalists in order that Scotland be entirely free and self-determined, to go where she will or whether our nationalism is full of a secret selfishness, a private satisfaction in seeing ourselves conduct ourselves like patriots, a hidden and unexpressed hope for a Scotland in which our own characteristics and prejudices will be triumphant and magnified exceedingly … Not only does Scottish nationalism officially avoid the subject of language, give it little or no place in its deliberations, and let it be understood that it has no opinion on this most important aspect of its case; but individual nationalists are frequently to be found holding – and occasionally expressing – the most divergent and sharply opposed views on the matter, and in particular the very mention of the Gaelic language is accustomed to call forth expressions of prejudice of surprising virulence.[56]

'Cùis na Cànain I' emphasises that English is not traditionally the language of the majority of Scots, but that it has become so and is, therefore, a contemporary issue related to Scottish independence: '…In habits, tastes, language and general outlook we are Anglicised, we are something less than Scots.'[57] Mac Colla avoids dealing with the psychological issues arising here. We shall return to this in a later section.

It is, of course, perfectly possible for a nation to operate independently, politically, without a unique – or separate – linguistic culture or society. Overlooking indigenous languages, Commonwealth nations such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada are representative of this, but so too are the United States and Ireland, all of which are now English-speaking. Mac Colla acquiesces in this regard briefly, though only to reaffirm his own argument:

> We do not deny the possibility, of course, of maintaining a separate nationality without a separate language. There are examples of nations that have found it

[55] Mac Colla, 22 July 1933, p.6.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

> possible. But it is another question how far those peoples exhibit true nationality and are not merely politically independent groups. Further, it is one thing to say it is possible; it is another thing whether it is easy, or safe to attempt, and as far as recent experience shows those "political" nations which do not possess a separate language, and the separate traditions and psychology that belong to it, go in constant danger of political absorption by the larger nation whose language they share, as soon as it no longer suits the latter to leave them in peace. The case of Austria at the present moment ought to be a warning and an example to those contemporaries of ours, unconsciously Anglophil and prejudiced, or merely unreflecting, who scorn the idea that Scottish Nationalism must take any account of the language and profess to believe that Scotland can be a satisfactory nation, complete in every attribute of nationality, and recognised as such by the rest of the world, while continuing to use for all serious purposes the language of the great foe to her nationality, England.[58]

It is the *extent* to which Scotland could be independent which is the issue in this case. For Mac Colla, true independence does not come with political independence alone. Mac Colla's philosophy advocates that true independence operates outside of politics. Thought itself must be independent. True independence is absolute and self-contained, and this 'true independence' is to be found, most naturally, through the only purely *Scottish* experience that he believes is to be found in the Gaelic language itself. This is a circular argument. Although the aim is a truly independent *people*, and not just an independent state, the condition of Gaelic itself was in no position to develop – or be developed – into this position in the 1930s. As such, political independence would need to be secured before attentions could be turned to seriously securing the status of the language. The language, however, as the embodiment of this independence, was the most precious and the most valuable thing.

> We do not intend…to enter here into a discussion of the precise relationship between language and nationality. We do not need to because it is beside the point, which is merely that there is a relationship. But we would bring the whole matter out of the air and down to the plane of realities by pointing out to those … unprofitable babblers that their spurious urbanity is out of place in present-day Scotland, and that while they are engaged in fruitless academic discussions on language in general, the language they ought to be concerned

[58] 'Cuis na Canain VIII', in *The Free Man*, 16 September 1933, p. 4.

> about is at the point of death and the nation in which they claim so irresponsible a membership about to lose a priceless possession irretrievably.[59]

At the heart of Mac Colla's entire work is a striving to convince Scots that it was possible to establish the nation which Scotland had never become. 'The connection between the Gaelic language and Scottish nationality was so clearly not an external or accidental one, but Gaelic speech was so plainly organic with the growth of the Scottish nation, that intelligent men who are familiar with the historic and contemporary parallels will have reason to doubt very gravely whether the latter is capable of continuance in any effective sense after the former has perished.'[60] Again, this demonstrates Mac Colla's essentialist attitude with regard to Gaelic and Scotland. He exclaims purity, but his history is crude rhetoric in a modern context.

Mac Colla was attempting to convince Scots that it was possible to establish a new Scotland from what could be salvaged from the Gaelic one. Like *The Albannach*, *And the Cock Crew* is a book *about* the language that it should be written in, but is not. This was a frustrating endeavour. Such frustration left bitterness, and Mac Colla never realised his full and most positive potential. His posthumous work was edited by John Herdman, Ruth McQuillan and Mary Macdonald before it could be published, and still, *Move Up, John* and *The Ministers* are not held in the same critical regard as *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew*. Iain Crichton Smith writes that the particular religious focus of *The Minsters*, '…of evil arising from ideology…' makes it 'a disturbing book.'[61] Despite his own involvement in publishing it, Herdman acknowledges that *The Ministers* will disappoint some readers: '*The Ministers* is a novel which I would expect many critics to reject, I believe wrongly …the action

[59] Mac Colla, 16 September 1933, p.6.
[60] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Cuis na Canain IX', in *The Free Man*, 23 September 1933, p. 5.
[61] Iain Crichton Smith, 'A Visionary and his Enemies', *Glasgow Herald*, 26 April 1979, p.8.

is…severely circumscribed, and it may be expected that for some it will seem insufficient to make a novel.'[62] And Douglas Gifford writes:

> Sadly, it appears clear to me that MacColla was a writer of occasional greatness; that *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* caught all his best creative writing (and even there the propaganda element, that shrill hatred of England and Anglicisation, comes close to spoiling the un-dogmatic, free creative fiction) and that this novel [*The Ministers*] marks where MacColla's abilities had come to rest in the last third of his life. It shows quite clearly that MacColla's tendency to long tracts of argument and prosy (but admittedly never boring) discussion had triumphed over his marvellous gift of evoking landscape background as mood, as poetic extension to his action. There is nothing here of the brilliant, desolate opening atmosphere of *And the Cock Crew*.[63]

The frustrations of Scotland's political and cultural position as the twentieth century progressed are increasingly reflected in his work. In *And the Cock Crew*, what Gifford calls 'that shrill hatred of England and Anglicisation' is, of all his novels, most apparent. Mac Colla addresses the issue of English through the example of education.

Education: The Transmission of Values

The economist E.F. Schumacher writes in his critique of capitalist economics, *Small is Beautiful* (1974), that '...Education is the most vital of all resources.'[64] Given Mac Colla's trained profession, the state and purpose of teaching in Scotland was always a concern for him. 'Cùis na Cànain' brings education to the centre of nationalist politics. Schumacher continues:

> The essence of education...is the transmission of values, but values do not help us to pick our way through life unless they have become our own, a part, so to say, of our mental make-up. This means that they are more than mere formulae or dogmatic assertions: that we think and feel with them, that they are the very instruments through which we look at, interpret, and experience the world. When we think, we do not just think: we think with ideas. Our

[62] John Herdman, '*The Ministers* by Fionn Mac Colla', *Akros*, 14.41 (1979), p.91- 92.
[63] Douglas Gifford, 'Recent Scottish Fiction', *Books in Scotland*, 4 (1979), 13-15, (p.13).
[64] E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (London: Abacus, 1974), p.64.

> mind is not a blank, a *tabula rasa*. When we begin to think we can do so only because our mind is already filled with all sorts of ideas *with which* to think… First of all, there is language. Each word is an idea.[65]

Schumacher argues here that not only is education a fundamental human experience, but also that it is a varying and subjective experience dependent on the language one is schooled in. Throughout his work, Mac Colla presses that the Gaelic window on to the world is being lost. In 'Cùis na Cànain' II' he identifies ways in which this is being done:

> A purely English education, with a powerful imperialist bias, forcibly imposed upon four generations, has produced a universal and total ignorance of the whole matter, so that in all fairness our contemporaries must be held guiltless in the matter of their ignorance, and only to blame in so far as they have accepted it, acquiesced in it. History has been distorted or suppressed, traditions torn up by the roots, Teutonic forms of speech arbitrarily and with a high hand forced upon this nation, with such success that few Scotsmen of the present day know as much as a word of the Gaelic language – even what it is; that it is a national, and Scottish, language...[66]

Mac Colla argues that the language question cannot be properly addressed until social history is properly understood and clearly believes that there is a prejudice of some sort, in-built, in many Scots. Control over education, and over the form this education takes, is fundamental.

Cultural criticism with regard to Scotland and its place within the Union has been viewed within an established postcolonial context since Mac Colla's period. It is, then, possible to view Mac Colla's arguments through postcolonial criticism as it is applied to the concepts of social and cultural hegemony in Britain. In *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture*, Beveridge and Turnbull note how this argument over the discourse of Scottish education, for example, can be traced to the 'long nineteenth century *Kulturkampf* in Scotland' and that this was more than 'just a quarrel about academic

[65] Ibid.
[66] 'Cuis na Canain II', in *The Free Man*, 29 July 1933, p.4.

curricula: at stake … was the future of Scottish civilisation.'[67] The idea that the education system is intrinsically linked to the cultural and political position of the nation and its people is a principle argument of postcolonial theory, and the cultural hegemony bound within it. Quoting George Davie's *The Democratic Intellect*, Beveridge and Turnbull note that the transformations in education during the nineteenth century were crucial to the perception of the nation: 'what was being decided by the struggle was the fate of the distinctive sort of society developed by Scots.'[68] Mac Colla's position, of course, was that the cultural hegemony which was devolved from the Union, resulted in a linguistic hegemony and the decline of Gaelic as a language. Without the distinctive 'Scottish civilization', Gaelic would continue to decline. The position of the education system then, is one which has been utilised to analyse and criticise the position of Scottish society from within this postcolonial perspective. Beveridge and Turnbull's analysis presents the education system as a tool of cultural hegemony: '…the main function of schools is to condemn the populace to philistinism.'[69] Turnbull and Beveridge reflect Mac Colla's argument in the 1930s and it is possible to see how, within an anthropological context, as well as a linguistic and cultural context, arguments relating to the cultural hegemony of England through the Union have been developed within a postcolonial context since Mac Colla's period. Leaving aside Scotland's involvement in the Empire, elements of postcolonial theory certainly can be applied to the Gaidhealtachd, and would be congruous with Mac Colla's own arguments. Discussing Franz Fanon, Beveridge and Turnbull note: 'Fanon uses the idea to describe these processes in a relationship of national dependence which lead the native to doubt the worth and significance of

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[67] Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), p.79.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., p.89

inherited ways of life and embrace the styles and values of the coloniser … it is through the undermining of the native's self-belief and the disintegration of local identity that political control is secured.'[70] Such a theory is clearly reflected in Mac Colla's novels, as is evidenced by Murdo Anderson's perception of the young Gaels he interacts with, and their attitude towards Gaelic as a backward and primitive culture and also in *And the Cock Crew* during Fearchar's long conversation with Maighstir Sachairi when he highlights how cultural hegemony leads to political dominance. While Turnbull and Beveridge present their case from a pro-independence position, this brief analysis of their arguments serves to illustrate how postcolonial approaches to literature and society have developed since Mac Colla's time and have been applied to the position of Scotland and Scottish culture. Postcolonial considerations such as 'cultural polyvalency' and the presentation of difference, or marginality as strength, are to be found in Mac Colla's novels. Muir's notion of 'civilization' and Mac Colla's arguments regarding education and history (and the attitude towards the Reformation's position in facilitating the Union, which was shared by both men) clearly connect with aspects of postcolonial theory.

Much of the ancient historical focus in 'Cùis na Cànain' is a subverted context for the condition of Gaelic in Scotland and the United Kingdom. In 'Cùis na Cànain V' for example: 'by the third century A.D. the upper class Gaul were already completely Romanised. They had accepted Roman laws, habits, and civil administration. They had put aside Gaulish in favour of Roman nationality. They spoke only Latin, discarded their Celtic names, and adopted others that would sound less barbarous in the ears of their conquerors. But it took another two centuries for the language to be

[70] Ibid., p.5.

finally driven out of the countryside.'[71] This is crude history, but Mac Colla is effectively highlighting assimilation as the most effective method with which to conquer. In *And the Cock Crew*, such historical examples are given a more relative context in fiction. During their long conversation, Fearchar makes this very point to Sachairi the minister. Throughout this part of the conversation Mac Colla develops the attitude which was also articulated in 'Cùis na Cànain': that it was a focus of the Empire to remove and eradicate any example of authentic 'Scottishness' which was a threat, even (if not especially) after the union:

> ...Suppose there are two nations, Maighstir Sachairi. Two nations that are neighbours; and one of them bigger than the other and more numerous….The larger nation is trying to conquer and bring into subjection the one that is smaller… But now suppose that the big nation understands at last that it is no use to try to conquer them by force of arms. Suppose they try another way… And so they will get with friendship and a trick what they could never win by war and arms...The big nation would go on and not rest till it had utterly destroyed and eaten up the little nation, harrying its people from the land and uprooting them until nothing was left, neither land nor people – except that now it would commit at its leisure, under the pretext of government and with forms of Law, the devastations it made in former times with invading armies, and the little nation would not now be able to resist it...[72]

Murray and Tait write of Mac Colla that: '…His trenchant expression of extreme anti-English views [were] often an embarrassment to more moderate nationalists.'[73] Perhaps, to accuse Mac Colla of being anti-English would be to overlook the social context of Gaelic within a union with a largely English (and almost entirely English-speaking) establishment. The administration of the Education (Scotland) Act 1872 is one example, as was discussed in chapter three. There are many more which could be demonstrated here in support of Mac Colla's stance.[74] Mac Colla was of the educated

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[71] 'Cuis na Canain V', in *The Free Man*, 26 August 1933, p.8.
[72] Mac Colla, 1995, p.108-9.
[73] Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, 'Fionn MacColla: *And the Cock Crew*', *Ten Modern Scottish Novels*, 55-77, (p.56).
[74] Another inspiration for Mac Colla's stance was the Scots National League's position on education: '…it was important to provide a 'corrective' analysis of Scottish history which … had been distorted

opinion that an English establishment had targeted Gaelic so as to conquer any linguistic independence in the people who spoke it and assimilate them into the Empire. At this point, Gramsci's ideas of hegemony can be applied to Mac Colla's views on the 'colonisers' of the Gaels, namely the Calvinist doctrines and the British state. As Steve Jones writes: '… To genuinely engage with the culture of the "subaltern" groups means treating seriously those practices and values which are meaningful to them, but which are by no means necessarily progressive.'[75] While it cannot be said the British state was sympathetic to Gaelic language or society, from Mac Colla's perspective it was able to collude with the Church in 'de-Gaelicising' children in schools which had always had very strong links to the Church in Scotland.

What is abundantly clear is that the Gaels, for the most part, lacked the agency to lead a struggle against the hegemonic tactics of the British state. Given, as Mac Colla notes, and as is presented in this thesis through evidence from SNL propaganda, there was and is a conception that this agency was appropriated by the Church, which, it has been argued, preached that the Clearances were a punishment from God.

The assimilation seems to have been quite straightforward in this case as the authority outside of the Church cannot be said to have been influenced by an over-capitulation to the Gaels. The state did not take on the struggles of the Gaels in search of their support; neither did the Church, with few exceptions. The Church and the state did not seek to win hearts and minds until it could be demonstrated that Gaelic was regressive, and that anybody seeking to make their way in the world would do better to 'anglicise' themselves. This can be related to the concept of 'excellence' in Gramsci's philosophy of ideology and hegemony, in which a hegemon attempts to '…isolate one prominent motif within attempts to win over a particularly valued

since the Union as part of the plan to destroy the Scottish national identity. The teaching of 'bogus' Scottish history in schools, they claimed, was a favourite Unionist tactic.' Finlay, 1994, p.38.

[75] Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), p.46.

subaltern group, the contemporary middle classes.'[76] The 'self-governing individual' is, in this case, highlighted as the 'lad o' pairts' willing to abandon Gaelic language and culture, and 'anglicise' in order to get on.

Mac Colla's only weapon was literature. His novels were created to act as weapons. It is true that English ascendancy and dominance had threatened both Scottish political nationalism and the Gaelic language. That *both* were threatened, suppressed and opposed testifies to Mac Colla's position that *both* were to be found in each other.

The decline of Gaelic and the ascension of English is a crucial element to the historical context of *And the Cock Crew*. Mac Colla seeks to bring to light '…The factors which contributed to the decline of Gaelic from the seventeenth century when half the population of Scotland spoke Gaelic.'[77] It is because '...The removal of whole swathes of the Highland population, bound together by language, was an act bordering on genocide', that Mac Colla uses it as a recent, and inflammatory, historical example with which to combine contemporary nationalism and the history of the Gaels in his argument that Scotland was being conquered through assimilation.[78] Once again, Fearchar the poet is used to articulate this message:

> 'If a nation gives up its ways and its language and the things that belong to its nationality, and takes the ways and language of another nation, then it can be said to have been conquered by that other nation. No matter whether it was defeated in battle or not. And if some men in a nation take on the ways and language of another nation, having given up those that belong to themselves, then they have in a true sense been conquered by that other nation, even though they will still remain subjects within their own. *But they will be dangerous subjects to their liberties*…Why were traitors so many in a nation so devoted to freedom? It was because there had begun to be amongst us those that were not altogether Albannaich for they had forgotten the language of the forefathers and taken on an English language, with English ways...If they had been Albannaich, true Albannaich, who had never forgotten our

[76] Ibid., p.58-59.
[77] Francis Thompson, 'How Strong the Horsehair?', in *Gaelic: Looking to the Future* (Dundee: Andrew Fletcher Society, 1985), 1-10, (p.2).
[78] Ibid., p.4.

> language and the ways of our forefathers, they would not have sold those liberties for their lives, for they would have known that to be English and the subjects of England was for them the same thing as to cease to be.'[79]

Fearchar's insistence that the Clearances are intended to destroy Gaelic culture and conquer Scotland completely by removing the last of the 'true Albannaich' is clearly developed from Mac Colla's 'Cùis na Cànain' propaganda.[80]

An example of the socialist sentiment expressed in writing at the time in Scotland is Tom Johnston's *Our Noble Families*. Published in 1919, it is prefaced by the future first Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald. It is a general indictment of the landowning classes in Scotland and elucidates the roots of the socialist movement in Scotland at a time before there was a credible nationalist movement. Mac Colla joined the Independent Labour Party in 1923 and the sentiments in Johnston's book are an indicator of the radical politics which were being pursued and discussed in the United Kingdom as a whole during this period: 'The first step in Reform, either of the Land Laws or of the House of Lords, is to … show the people that our Old Nobility is not noble, that its lands are stolen lands – stolen either by force or fraud; show people that the title-deeds are rapine, murder, massacre, cheating or Court harlotry; dissolve the halo of divinity that surrounds the hereditary title; let the people clearly understand that our present House of Lords is composed largely of

[79] Mac Colla, 1995, p.113-4.

[80] Clearly, Mac Colla was influenced by the work of the SNL: 'It was argued that, in keeping with an evolving imperialist nature, the English were forced to adopt new methods in order to try and gain control of the Scots. In other words, as noted by Lindsay Crawford in *Liberty*, a sympathetic journal of the period, 'What England was not able to wrest from Scotland on the battlefield, she set about attaining by chicanery and political intrigue' (Finlay, 1994, p.38).

The SNL's view of history significantly overlooks the Reformation, '…because of the inability to explain this within the League's concept of the perennial unity of the Scottish nation' (Ibid., p.45). As this thesis attests, Mac Colla made the Reformation central in his work. Clearly, one of his over-riding themes, the lack of Scottish unity, nationally and psychologically, was something which had also been a major issue for the SNL: 'The creation of false divisions, the League argued, was a standard practice of English colonial policy, which grouped subjugated people against each other' (Ibid., p.37). Gaelic, the SNL argued, was the cultural bedrock of Scottish nationality, upon which a Scottish state could be founded. Historians have identified anti-English sentiment among some of the SNL's ranks, mostly fuelled at the time by events in Ireland, seen then as an example of English colonial rule in a Celtic nation.

descendants of successful pirates and rogues; do these things and you shatter the Romance that keeps the nation numb and spellbound while privilege picks its pockets.'[81]

The focus on landowning families in Scotland demonstrates the local, socialist political dimension which encouraged young radicals like Mac Colla to engage with politics as an instrument for changing society. The arguments in *Our Noble Families*, however, are limited to reforming the aristocracy and do not advocate independence, which, after the Liberals and the first Labour government failed to deliver Home Rule, began to command critical attention, attracting those like Mac Colla who had begun to recognise that such radical pronouncements against the British establishment could not readily fly off the pages until Scotland, at least, was removed from it.

The illustration here, through a juxtaposition of some of the content of these wide-ranging articles with the political message of *And the Cock Crew* expresses just how necessary it is to view Mac Colla's numerous contributions to *The Free Man* as an integral part of his body of work.

Through his work in *The Free Man*, the contemporary context in which he was writing becomes visible. The serious student of Mac Colla can thereby comprehend his effort in a far more informed fashion. Everything that Mac Colla wrote was urgently agenda-driven to the point that it is a continuous and unrelenting commentary on Scottish nationalism and cultural politics. This is the voice of the Gael in the early to mid-twentieth century, when such argument was necessarily urgent. This next sample, from 'Cùis na Cànain XIV' demonstrates the struggle which Mac Colla perceived around him, and which he believed enveloped his personal past and that of his people. In order for Gaelic to survive, English would

[81] Tom Johnston, *Our Noble Families* (Glasgow: Forward, 1919) p. X.

need to be resisted, at least to the point where it was no longer a threat to the independence of the Albannaich:

> …If a culture is a way of life, if it expresses itself in the uniqueness of all the forms of the life of a people, very obviously nothing can possess two unique forms simultaneously and neither can a people naturally possess two cultures. The very fact that a culture is a way of life means that in order to be it must be different from, and exclusive of, other ways of life. Wherever two cultures exist side by side in the same people it is always in the state of conflict, of war to the death, the native culture fighting against the invading culture and each in order to survive compelled to kill each other.[82]

The paradox is that in writing in English about Gaelic culture, Mac Colla is disproving his own argument. The ferocity of the argument, though, adds immeasurably to the tension in his fiction. Even so, Mac Colla's work as a novelist presents an essentialist view of Scotland. He excludes opposition to his own political position by presenting it as an opposition to Gaelic. He represents, through his fiction, a notion of 'purity' which exists in an ideally 'inviolable' Gaelic language, or experience. Through this, he attacks what he considers is a conventional misunderstanding of Gaelic in Scotland. Scotland's position should be that of a Gaelic nation, according to Mac Colla. It is this essentialist attitude to the idea of a 'pure' and 'Scottish' Scotland, which informs the political dimensions of his writing. This is an uncompromising position for a writer to take. What is less certain, though, is whether Mac Colla's politics formed his attitude towards language to a greater extent than his attitude to language and culture formed this politically 'essentialist' approach. Immersion in a national language was a natural position for a political nationalist. Nevertheless, this difficulty inherent in Mac Colla's cultural position frustrates his politics. Arguments for political independence aside, his contentions on culture and language are incongruous with his actual literary output. It is an argument which may be easily countered and may thereby diminish the cogency of the political

[82] 'Cuis na Canain XIV', in *The Free Man*, 28 October 1933, p.8.

quality of his ideas. One could argue that as Mac Colla himself did not produce literature in Gaelic, his essentialist approach actually reduces and harms the potency of his political argument. If one of the most high-profile proponents of a cultural essentialism did not practice it, it would need to be assumed that the political argument informed the promotion of cultural 'difference', as discussed above, for its own ends. Such a politically motivated position is itself a form of romanticism.

Mac Colla's failure as a theorist is his triumph as a literary artist. The central *drama* of *And the Cock Crew* is a *dialogue*. The central tragedy of the novel is that both Fearchar and Sachairi fail not only the people they represent, but through the language the novel is written in, represent that failure. Mac Colla, as a literary artist, conveys this tragedy to future generations, readers of the novel throughout the world as well as the inhabitants of its geography.

Objective Control: The Representation of Maighstir Sachairi

Alan Bold concludes in *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* that the negative tone in *And the Cock Crew* is one of its most overwhelming features: '…Mac Colla's evocation of the nay-saying theology that meant spiritual death to much of Scotland is in itself negative. Nowhere does he offer any hope of a Gaelic renaissance in the novel.'[83] This is true – Mac Colla had already addressed the youthful and optimistic paradigm for the Gaelic situation in *The Albannach*. The optimism of that first book is a reflection of the political landscape of the period for young Scottish nationalists like Mac Colla, paralleling the emergence of an official nationalist movement. It can be argued that by the time *And the Cock Crew* was finished, the Second World War had changed public perception in Scotland. The fates of both Murdo Anderson and

[83] Alan Bold, 'And the Cock Crew', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison, 38-45, p.43.

Sachairi Wiseman reflect both this shift in the zeitgeist and Mac Colla's own attitude. Murdo settles his own struggle for unity and survives in his 1920s Crofting community. Sachairi has notions of self and unity fractured, and is killed following injuries received during an Eviction. The damaged character of Sachairi Wiseman is representative of Mac Colla's attitude towards Scotland itself by this point in his life and career.

And the Cock Crew was intended to bring the injustices and brutality of the Highland Clearances to the fore of the politically-minded Scottish literary renaissance by examining and debating the cultural and political arguments at its core. The characters in *And the Cock Crew* develop arguments which Mac Colla uses to discuss the themes which are at play in the book. As an historical novel, the plot is determined in that the glen will be cleared. Its characters, its inhabitants, are essentially helpless, while the embodiments of authority and cultural traditions argue over the consequences of The Clearances for Gaelic, Scotland and mankind. The main characters of *And the Cock Crew* articulate Mac Colla's arguments (arguments which have been detailed in the 'Cùis na Cànain' section) although they possess their own vivid particularity. In this sense, Mac Colla the nationalist is strongly present in *And the Cock Crew* – it is a novel of polemic which, in places, is the most accomplished example of how he used his art form to represent his politics.

While examining *Move Up, John*, which Mac Colla had not regarded as a success and had abandoned before completion, John Herdman comments on Mac Colla's influence over the characters in his novels. His general conclusions here are useful in considering the contexts of his characters:

> The tendency to create representative types is present in Mac Colla's work from the start; but in *The Albannach* the issues are still seen very much in personal terms, and we have a vivid and living central figure corresponding to the artist's viewpoint; while in *And the Cock Crew* the inherent human interest

> of the subject-matter, the strongly developed narrative, and the comparatively fully articulated character of Maighstir Sachairi serve at once to conceal the tendency and to convert it into an unobtrusive artistic virtue...a novel cannot possibly be a 'method of enquiry', because its characters are not autonomous objects in the outer world which can simply be set in motion and then observed fulfilling their destiny according to supposed internal laws; they are, on the contrary, necessarily products of their creator's subjectivity, and in Mac Colla's case they remain to an unusual degree subject to his fully conscious control.[84]

Mac Colla's intentions for *Move Up, John*, that it should be a 'method of enquiry' and that its characters be free from outside or artistic *influence* is problematic. Is such a statement deliberately misleading on Mac Colla's part in order to play up his own objectivity in the face of accusations of sectarian (religious or political) bias? Any notion that his novels were an objective 'method of inquiry' is refutable given the obviously polemical nature of much of his work. Herdman concludes that Mac Colla's attempt to present an authorial neutral 'objectivity' in later work like *The Ministers* and *Move Up, John*, through long tracts of narrative debate between his characters, in an attempt to weigh up opposing arguments, 'suggests' a distancing from his readers. If we look at the opening paragraph of *The Ministers* Mac Colla can only set this new experiment of objectivity within the realm of astronomical cosmos. Objectivity is established not from the position of an omnipresent narrator, but of the objective universe itself:

> The Sidereal universe: existent, in energy: this moment of time. The planetary order: in motion: the earth tilting over. The northern hemisphere: Europe facing sunwards: the British islands. To their west, at the ocean's edge, the north-west coast of Scotland, rockful, splashed and sun-splintered standing over the waters of the Minch. He is a consciousness at a window there, in this evasive moment, looking on those fickle waters which choose now to be still, with an effect of brimming-up all over their glassy, sunlit surface.[85]

[84] Herdman, 'Fionn Mac Colla Art and Ideas', in *Cencrastus*, Summer 1983, 11-13.
[85] Mac Colla, 1979, p.1.

Mac Colla's focus on objectivity is intended to guard against his opinions being dismissed as no more than the author's bias. In relentlessly arguing his case 'objectively', however, as Herdman notes, Mac Colla protests too much. His own politics are so ingrained in his novels because they are his motivation. Thomas Crawford argues that Mac Colla's personality makes it impossible for him not to dominate his books: 'By temperament Mac Colla is drawn to polemical assertion and discussion, and there is a constant danger that his characters might suffer from the writer's intrusion.'[86]

The extent to which Mac Colla takes control of the arguments in *And the Cock Crew* and in his later work is no surprise but it is important to understand why the novels written after *The Albannach*: *And the Cock Crew, The Ministers* and *Move Up, John*, all make use of lengthy dialectical argument where representative characters are engaged in highly directed and subjective opinionated debate. Herdman again concludes that this was a conscious and deliberate move on Mac Colla's part to appear 'objective':

> …We must bear in mind his personal religious history: raised as a member of the Plymouth Brethren in Montrose, in his early twenties a teacher of History in a Church of Scotland college in Palestine, at thirty a convert to Roman Catholicism...Mac Colla was acutely sensitive to charges that he wrote out of Catholic *parti pris*, and resentful of the conclusion that his ideas could be reduced to sectarian prejudice, explained away in those terms, and thus rendered 'safe'. In this he was fully justified for the most cursory glance at chronology makes it clear that his Catholicism was the result, and not the cause, of his convictions as to the radical perversity of Reformation theology; these came directly from the pressures of personal experience. Accordingly he was determined at all costs to assert the rational and objective basis of his conclusions and to defend reason itself in the face of its denigration by those whose attitudes of mind he saw as deriving ultimately from heretical theology...[87]

[86] Thomas Crawford, 'Essays on Fionn MacColla', *Scottish Literary News*, 3.2 (1973), 41-2, (p.41).
[87] Herdman, 1983, p.12.

Mac Colla is, paradoxically, occupying a position where he must attack subjective interpretations of doctrine and philosophy by creating 'objective' arguments in art, all the while being motivated by a carefully considered (and subjective) opposition to the doctrines he attacks, wary that his 'rationality' would itself be dismissed as religious or political bias. His intention was to defend 'reason' through 'objective' argument. This demonstrates the direction in which Mac Colla's work developed once he began to focus more heavily on religion and the Reformation, leaving Gaelic behind as a focus. It may even be argued that Mac Colla himself began to construct a negative argument in his later work.

The beginnings of this ostensibly objective, though ultimately negative, approach can be traced to *And the Cock Crew* in Sachairi and Fearchar's conversation. The arguments are clearly Mac Colla's, but when his characters debate in the novel, Mac Colla does not yet exercise the 'spirit analogous to that of a scientific experiment' which Herdman identified, and which comes to be a focus of his later novels.[88] In *And the Cock Crew* their argument is so intense and compelling because, as characters locked into a fictional moment of actual history, they are furiously concerned with the reality of their own future. Mac Colla's position as a writer of historical fiction is not to defuse the past as historically determined and *over*, but to understand and demonstrate how its arguments, dynamics and energies lead straight to the present and what the actual future might be. It is another paradox. As readers, we may know the historical outcome of the characters' situation, but *they* do not. And even while we know the consequences of that history, we do not know what the future will bring. It is this which makes the novel so constantly urgent, still pressingly relevant, fierce and applicable.

[88] Herdman, 1983, p. 12.

An Iron Text: The Conflict of Calvinism in *And the Cock Crew*

The main body of *And the Cock Crew* concerns the protagonist, Sachairi Wiseman, (known as Maighstir Sachairi to the local inhabitants of his parish of Gleann Luachrach), and his uncharacteristic indecision over whether to intervene against the impending clearance of the Glen, or through inaction, allow it to take place in the belief that it could be just punishment from God: '…And that it is possibly His wish that has cleared the Highlands of its Gaelic non-elect'[89] as retribution for their history of un-Godly vanity. Knowing that he alone in the Glen has the power to stand up to the hideous factor Mr. Byars, 'an oppressive bogeyman known to the Highlanders as the Black Foreigner'[90] and resist the destruction of the village, the people of Gleann Luachrach have put their faith in Sachairi to protect them. It is a cruel irony that it is the people's faith in Sachairi and their adoption of his ideologies and religion that has left them unable to defend themselves. Their trust that he will do 'right' by them and their faith in his 'truth' have led them to the point where they are defenceless. After learning of the Clearance of the surrounding townships, the men of Gleann Luachrach gather to discuss their worsening situation. The miller articulates their misplaced faith in Maighstir Sachairi:

> Maighstir Sachairi is a strong man, even the factor is afraid of him. And he is a just man, he will not be silent when things are done that are against justice. More than that, he is a man of God, Maighstir Sachairi, a man of prayer, and therefore God will be with him in the things he does. Trust to Maighstir Sachairi, men. He is for us. Let there be no more speaking about violence and revenging ourselves on the Black Foreigner; it is God that will punish him. And let us not be afraid either. Maighstir Sachairi is standing between us and harm.[91]

This is contrasted with the attitude of those who want to fight:

[89] Bold in Morrison, 1973, p.43.
[90] Ibid., p.39.
[91] Mac Colla, 1995, p.66.

> Domhnall Gorm was taken by a spasm of fury. He lifted his hand and dashed his pipe to the ground. 'I am seven times tired of hearing that word,' he shouted, livid. It's not God at all. It's just the same old black Satan, and his friend and servant the Black Foreigner…Truly I look at you and I don't know what has got into the Gaidheil nowadays. It goes beyond me. Here is a pig of a Saxon at his old play of harrying. He gives your roofs to the flames, turns your wives and your mothers into the world houseless, and takes for himself the fields that the forefathers brought back from the heather. And what do you do? You sit on your arses and you can't think of anything but to make your eyes like cows' and lift up your hands and say, "God help us for we don't intend to help ourselves!" Oh you have gone away from it altogether with godliness!'[92]

Domhnall Gorm is in the minority and his attitude is openly mocked, accentuating the distance that has now passed between the Gaels who settled this land, and the Gaels who are removed from it: 'So that's your way, Domhnall? Dirks is it? Claymores out of the thatch, eh Domhnall? … No doubt but we will now see Great-Domhnall-of-the-Battles drawing the Red-Soft-One against the Foreigners!'[93]

Sachairi enacts his religion, his influence and his control. Defensive autonomy has been crushed. The miller recounts Sachairi's arrival, demonstrating how psychology and culture have also been altered by Sachairi's influence: 'When he came to Gleann Luachrach many thought he was a hard man. At that time there was a great deal of foolishness and vanity, more than was fitting. Maighstir Sachairi was against it, and he did not spare us. Maybe he was hard, but if he was, it was for our sakes and to keep us from sin.'[94]

In *The Making of the Crofting Community* (2000), James Hunter discusses the control that evangelical religion had in the Scottish Highlands. It is this control which Mac Colla presents in *And the Cock Crew* as a factor in the collapse of Gaelic society, with military oppression and spiritual destitution laying a path for the complete destruction of spirit and community:

[92] Ibid., p.59.
[93] Ibid., p.60-61.
[94] Ibid., p.65.

> …The origins of this 'deep and stirring' religious awakening...are to be found in the social and psychological consequences of the collapse of clanship…The 'spiritual destitution' which nineteenth-century evangelicals discerned in the highlands was very real. It was the inevitable outcome of the absence…of any real sense of social cohesion or framework of moral reference. The evangelical faith helped make good this deficiency…a people, whose former way of life had been destroyed, found in a particularly fervent brand of Christianity…'a place to feel at home'.[95]

And the Cock Crew does not present the economic and agrarian reasons that were major contributory factors for the forced evictions in the Highlands. In this respect it cannot be considered a historical novel which annotates an impartial objective account of the Clearances. It is the psychological expression of the Clearances which is the focus of *And the Cock Crew*:

> Historians argue about the larger causes of the Clearances, and most suggest that some change was inevitable, that the Highlands were not able any longer to support the traditional population in the traditional manner. Be that as it may, novelist and reader are entitled to choose to concentrate on the terrible actual experience of a people…[96]

It is the human experience of the Clearances, and the loss that surrounds it which consumes Mac Colla's novel. The psychology of the tones of voice and intonations, the 'emptiness you can almost hear' is the articulation of Mac Colla's communing with his own history thorough the characters in his novel.[97] The poetry of the period also refers to this sense of what was being lost, as this emptiness and silence is articulated out of first hand experience. For example, this is the Gaelic poet Neil Macleod's (1843-1913) 'The Skye Crofters', translated from the original Gaelic:

> How sad is the story
> tonight from my homeland
> my kinsfolk being battered
> by daft Lowland men;
> with batons bared fully,
> being walloped like bullocks,

[95] Hunter, 2000, p.145.
[96] Murray and Tait, 1984, p.56.
[97] NLS Dep 239/12/f 'Notes on Gaelic'.

like slaves that are useless,
being cooped in a pen.

Forgotten those heroes
who protected our country,
with their weapons bared ready,
who taught tyrants to heed;
who would yield not to thralldom,
but maintained the just causes,
and bequeathed their fine morals
unspoilt to their seed.[98]

This poetry is the cultural memory of *And the Cock Crew*.

Among the critical work on the poetry of the Clearances which would have been available to Mac Colla during the 1940s, was Sorley Maclean's informative essay, 'The Poetry of the Highland Clearances', first published in 1938. In it, Maclean makes reference to a number of Gaelic bards, spanning the hundred years or so of the period of the Clearances, up to the late nineteenth century. He notes that 'Gaelic poetry in the 19th century is naturally depressing and hopeless in tone, until the resurgent spirit in the eighties, especially in Skye and Lewis, brought a new note of courage and hope…In the eighties exultation came again into Gaelic poetry with the songs of Mairi Mhor nan Oran.'[99] Maclean also discusses the angry poetry of the Clearances, some of which was anonymous, citing a satire on Riddell of Ardnamurchan: '*If I had you on the open field/with men tying you up/with my fists I would take out/three inches of your lungs*' and a poem he attributes to Dr John MacLachlan: '*And when a spade of earth goes on you/the country will be clean;/nothing will go on top of you but the dung of cattle;/there will be no weeping of children/nor wailing of women/there will be widow or poor one/striking their*

[98] Meek, 1995, p.224.
[99] Sorley Maclean, *The Poetry of the Clearances* in Gillies, W. (ed): *Ris a' Bhruthaich* (Stornoway: Acair, 1985), pp.50-51.

palms'.[100] The sentiment of the Gaelic verse of this period was depressing, bleak and angry; it was a sentiment that Mac Colla was able to translate into prose through the characters that identified with the dislocation at its heart. The influence of the Clearances on Gaelic poetry was something Maclean notes, identifying that by the nineteenth century, it had lost its 'power, gusto, spontaneity, joie de vivre.'[101] Maclean surmises that the cause of this was clear: '19th century poetry has nothing like its sheer power, but it has a more persistent feeling for humanity. I think that this development of a humanitarian quality is due mainly to the Clearances…'[102] Maclean notes that much of the poetry of this period also had clear nationalist sentiment, but that it is also 'too common a feature of Gaelic poetry to blame Englishmen and Lowlanders for the crimes of Highland chiefs.' It has already been argued in this thesis that accusations of anti-Englishness in Mac Colla's novels have been overemphasised. Where the subject is discussed, Mac Colla's anger is mainly directed at the Highland chiefs who abandoned their people, as in Fearchar's conversation with Sachairi, analysed in chapter four. Mairi Mhor is specifically highlighted by Maclean: 'This tendency gets an absurd expression in Mairi Mhor's wish to drive the Sasunnaich from Skye, where nearly all the principal Clearers had names at least as Gaelic as her own.'[103]

And the Cock Crew opens with a mass of Highland civilians expecting to be massacred by government soldiers under the command of Byars, after they have been marched into a glen to answer a spurious charge of assault. That they have come to expect such treatment at the hands of British troops demonstrates Gaelic Scotland's position here, and also Mac Colla's political agenda. The Highlands are occupied, the

[100] Ibid., pp.55-56.
[101] Ibid., p.57.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., p.59.

people are conquered and humiliated: '…A grotesquely vulnerable group of Highlanders so accustomed to viciousness that they cower before the enemy they once routed.'[104] This opening scene immediately sets a tension, which is then heightened throughout with the additional focus on Calvinism, cultural decline and psychological collapse. The people believe they are to be punished:

> 'The red soldiers! We are to be murdered! We are lost!' Women drew their plaids over their faces and began keening in high wailing voices, swaying to and fro. And everywhere, shouted fearfully or whispered in tones of terror, 'The soldiers! The red soldiers!' The whole company began pressing backwards and recoiling up the track. They were stopped by a tall gaunt figure in the rear. The minister had from the start been riding last of all so that any that fell out or thought to return found him there to turn them and urge them on. He now threw out his long arms and waved them up and down, as one heads off a straying flock. 'On! On!' he shouted in a hollow loud voice. 'What would you do, O people? Would you resist God's judgement? Submit! Submit! Submit! before a worse thing befall you!' Confronted with the excited and gesticulating figure, the foremost hesitated and drew back, throwing the others into greater confusion. The minister advanced upon them, waving his arms. 'The wrath of God is on you!' he shouted. 'Submit! Submit!'[105]

Another minister, Sachairi Wiseman, then makes his first appearance: '…a strong-looking reddish man …about the middle size, but looked both larger and redder because he was buzzing with rage.'[106] From this opening, Sachairi's capacity for strength is discernable as he stands up to the Factor. His inherent strength is reinforced after this scene when, from an altered perspective, his arrival at Gleann Luachrach is revealed and the exploration of his character begins:

> Twenty years before, Maighstir Sachairi came to Gleann Luachrach a young man of twenty-seven, full of zeal for the service of God. He found it given over to vanity; singing and dancing, contests of wit or manly prowess were the principal enjoyment of the people. But his zeal was not little…in the end he had them on their knees weeping and crying to God to avert the visitation of His wrath. The Holy Ghost swept through Gleann Luachrach with the sough of the whirlwind, so that any that were without the changed heart hid their

[104] Bold in Morrison, 1973, p. 40.
[105] Mac Colla, 1995, p.5.
[106] Ibid., p.14.

> faces and kept peace. Even Fearchar the poet had been confounded and silenced.[107]

The opening scene sets the tone in a different way though, when it ends with Sachairi saying to the people: 'For the present you are safe.'[108] A sense of doom dominates the novel. Sachairi himself becomes plagued by doubt as to whether such impending disaster in the form of clearance is a punishment from God and should be accepted without question as 'His Will', and indecision over whether this should be resisted as no more than the wicked acts of men. 'In his reflections he swings from one extreme of self-confident defiance of the factor to total doubt. He cannot tell how to interpret the coming evictions, from God or from man.'[109] He anticipates the brutality, but he is also a man whose zeal, even pride, is such that he *knows* that God commands human affairs and that each act and action is pre-determined.

In every respect Sachairi is presented as a good man, but 'a man with a closed mind'[110] susceptible to corruption by Calvinist doctrines, and consumed by them. The other ministers of the area, Maighstir Iain and Maighstir Tormod, accept the Clearances and warn the people not to resist them. Sachairi, at least, empathises with the human tragedy. It is revealed later that Maighstir Iain and Maighstir Tormod are to receive land once the people have been cleared, as Mac Colla connects political and religious corruption through the abuse of power: 'When it was first suggested to him, tentatively, that his parish should be unpeopled, and that it would be to his advantage if, like his brethren of the ministry, he would help those that hoped to gain by it, Maighstir Sachairi was outraged...'[111] Sachairi is not an easily definable character. He not only questions the meaning behind what is happening throughout the novel but

[107] Ibid., p.38-39.
[108] Ibid., p.20.
[109] Murray and Tait, 1984, p.66
[110] Bold in Morrison, 1973, p.40.
[111] Mac Colla, 1995, p.27.

also, as Fearchar discovers towards the novel's conclusion, he was himself once a '"poet" and had been given, as a youth, to...years...spent in pursuit of vanities, occupied with fleeting fancies and imaginations of passing beauties in his earthly mind'.[112] This is completely at odds with not only his pronouncements as a minister, but, apparently, his entire psychology. It is, perhaps, the earlier existence of this inner poetic humanity, which subconsciously provokes Sachairi's doubt and is the source of his psychological conflict. It is suggested more than once, that Sachairi was once attracted to a world in which he could perceive beauty. Fundamentally, however, Sachairi does not interpret God's presence in creation. There is no mystical contemplation or question in Sachairi's interpretation of existence. God created Sachairi's world, but he is absent from it.

Mac Colla had converted to Catholicism in 1935, and though there is no discussion of Catholicism in *And the Cock Crew* the detail with which Sachairi's Calvinist psychology is presented as flawed, can clearly be contrasted against what Mac Colla considered to be a more spiritual, liberating Catholic experience of life. In his examination of spirituality, *The Catholic Imagination*, Andrew Greeley articulates the Catholic experience, which is, at once, recognisable in contrast to the doctrines that Mac Colla presents to us through Sachairi:

> Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation. As Catholics, we find our houses and our world haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of grace.[113]

[112] Ibid., p.29.
[113] Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 2001), p.1.

The vanquished creative, 'spiritual' side of Sachairi is representative of the 'yea' culture Mac Colla claimed to espouse, and which he considered was suppressed by doctrines such as those of Calvinism. This, in turn, is representative of Scotland's position in Mac Colla's philosophy. For Mac Colla, the split enacted in the Reformation initiated a psychological schism in Scotland from which it has never recovered. Quoting from *Ane Tryall of Heretics* in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist,* Mac Colla explains this position with reference to the essentialist attitude of the 'nay-sayer':

> The concept of the "twa-fauld nature of man, and ane of the kinds 'Chosen,' the other 'Reprobate'" – came into conjunction and fused with the concept and sentiment of the tribe or nation. In that case the "Chosen" would immediately become the tribe or nation itself, or rather those members of it who possessed or were imbued with the consciousness – and in due course the doctrine – of its uniqueness in the sense of being in an absolute way superior, of a different and special "kind," separated by an unbridgeable gulf from all the rest outside in the wilderness of non-membership; whom moreover it was the "Chosen" race's inevitable and joyous Destiny to subjugate or put out of the world.[114]

He presents this attitude of the 'negator' as the continuous incarnation of *opposition*, though not just in Scotland, and not just through religion:

> The events of the Reformation as a religious occurrence … were only the *means* whereby a primary movement in the depths of the soul – the Nay-say or repudiation of the non-"I" which is of no time or century or rather of every time and century – caused affairs in the upper world of consciousness and in society to constitute themselves in such a fashion as to provide it with scope and freedom in the conditions obtaining in the sixteenth century.[115]
>
> … Finally the violent bursting out on to the field of history of men who had undergone such a process and become imbued with such ideas, their violent struggle being an attempt to compel human reality as it *is* to conform to the actual inner state of their *will*, externalising itself through their theories and ideas.[116]

[114] Mac Colla, 1967, p.160.
[115] Ibid., p.149.
[116] Ibid., p.160.

As can be seen through the contemporary context of the 'Cùis na Cànain' articles, this battle is about psychology. For Mac Colla, it was as relevant in the 1920s and 30s as it was in the Reformation. Mac Colla believed that this psychology of divisive negativity was manifested through Reformation Protestantism, through the Factors who cleared the Highlands, in Bolshevism, in Fascism, and in Empire, in English Ascendency over Gaelic. If, as he argues in 'Cùis na Cànain', history must be understood in order to make sense of the present, then *And the Cock Crew* is intended as a historical novel constructed of contemporary political argument with perennial importance.

Mac Colla's position is extreme. His focus may be on the condition of the soul or psyche but for all of Mac Colla's talk of affirmation and saying 'yea' to life, he does not portray these aspects of society in this novel. An interesting aside to this argument is to be found in Riach and Moffat's *Arts of Resistance*:

> If the great dream of humanity is to bring about some kind of social justice and real egalitarianism, then a myth that configures that desire is enabling, rather than restrictive, and it is one of the strongest things in all the arts that have come out of Scotland … Cynicism is on the side of the opposition.[117]

Mac Colla does not present such an egalitarian myth in this novel. Mac Colla negates his own cause through his own cynicism, by presenting Scotland's history as having generated divisiveness over diversity.

Alan Bold writes: 'Maighstir Sachairi, for all his raw and impulsive bravado, is soon to emerge as a theologically arid type. A man with a closed mind, but still a man in search of abstract perfection.'[118] Despite his doctrines, Sachairi is strongly independent. He is a character of conflicting and complex suppressed psychology. Sachairi's 'natural humanity' has been suppressed by doctrines and by his own

[117] Alexander Moffat and Alan Riach, *Arts of Resistance* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2008) pp.46-7.
[118] Bold in Morrison, 1973, p.40.

righteous zeal, which, through his increasingly obsessive focus on judgement and punishment for the weakness of mankind, leads him to conclude at one point that the impending Clearance must be a judgement on the inherent wickedness of humanity as it is represented here in the culture of Gaelic Scotland.

Following the dramatic events of chapter one, the psychological examination of Sachairi's character begins immediately when he learns of the scandal of the unmarried Mairi Eoghann Gasda who reveals to him that she is pregnant. The scale of this moral corruption is registered through Sachairi's repugnance: 'Maighstir Sachairi was shocked and dismayed. In all his life he had never stumbled upon so scandalous an instance, nor had so unpleasingly thrust before him the depravity of hearts.'[119]This situation is elemental. Sachairi's zeal takes the form of admonition. The minister alone is continuously exposed to the wickedness and weakness of Man. The demonstration here is of an institution or system which is able to command morality itself. Sachairi is the embodiment of this judgement:

> Sin! When he came to Gleann Luachrach he had found plenty of it. At that time men were possessed by a spirit of impious levity, wholly given to worldliness and Satan's service. There was nothing greater with them at that time than to excel in the popular forms of vanity and he was most esteemed whose arms most lustily swung the hammer, whose foot was swiftest in the race, or fingers nimblest on the chanter, whose voice was sweetest in singing of old wars and carnal love and profanity, whose wit most often overwhelmed the other in the louder laughter. It was nothing for the pipes to make their appearance even at the Sacraments, so that the worship of God was scarcely done before the young people were over the wall and busy dancing, the while their elders gossiped and jested shamelessly among the graves and (as was likely) some old cailleach, namely for quickness of tongue, sat on a tombstone and amid the immoderate unseemly mirth of admiring acquaintance held her court and engaged all corners. He had thought in those days that contempt for Godliness could go no farther.[120]

Even with the human compassion he feels for his congregation, it is their sin which brings him to them and as such, he must bear witness to their wickedness. To further

[119] Mac Colla, 1995, p.21.
[120] Ibid., p.21.

compound the issue, Mairi will not divulge the identity of the father: 'You know, Maighstir Sachairi, that the Black Foreigner has sent out an order to the people of Gleann Mor, that if any man marries a wife his land will be taken away from him and his house will be pulled down and both himself and all his family will be driven out into the world and banished from the neighbourhood.'[121] Here is the combination of an imposed morality, with the subjugation, under foreign law, of the people in the Gaidhealtachd. Sachairi's Law dictates that he act as a moral authority, upholding the Law of God. The people of Gleann Luachrach live under tyranny. It is the sheer prevalence of sin which Sachairi, as a righteous man, perceives around him that confirms his thoughts of Judgment:

> Nothing less than such a thing as outraged him in his very being could have wakened him out of his blindness. Now at least he could not be ignorant that sin in its ugliest shapes was about and prowling; and maybe the timely discovery had saved him on the brink of opposing himself to the will of God.[122]

It is worth returning to the tone of the novel here. Apocalyptic imagery is a recurrent theme. The surrounding pastures having been torched, cattle roam in starving herds:

> Maighstir Sachairi looked at the approaching drove, and at the sight he could have grat. At the same time, too, he felt revolted by something about it that seemed grisly, horrible, and unnatural. The cattle were so emaciated that many of them resembled skeletons. They walked only at a snail's pace, moving their legs slowly and with difficulty, and as they staggered along their heads drooped and lolled about, the eyes without life staring dully.[123]

Byars, the Factor, is often portrayed as the incarnation of this judgement, surveying in this excerpt, his destruction of Strath Meadhnoch, the neighbouring township:

> Because of the faintness of the wind it lay there undisturbed. Down there everything was obscured and hidden by the smoke. The whole glen was filled with it, and neither fields nor houses nor even the flames could be seen under its dense blanket. The Factor looked a while at the grey pall moving slightly

[121] Ibid., p.23.
[122] Ibid., p.29.
[123] Ibid., p.71.

> with an undulating motion like the sea, and a smile played about his mouth … Away down in the glen bottom he thought he heard a noise of some commotion, a confused noise in which could be detected faint sounds like distant shouting or shrieking. The Factor's smile broadened.[124]

Sachairi's own judgment over the people had always been resolute in matters of sin. However, once the question of doubt as to the Will of God begins to manifest itself, Sachairi begins to question not only his perceptions, but also his ability to 'judge' clearly. *And the Cock Crew* is indeed a study of the impact of Calvinist theology, but at a psychological level. Sachairi realises that he wrongs his people in not defending them. The novel focuses on this character and his personal, psychological, conflict:

> ...He could not understand this feeling that he had wronged the people. His pain and trouble was that he could no longer understand anything, things or himself. Himself least of all. Something had happened to him – so much he knew... With God's Word before him it ought to be clear enough, though often difficult, often against his human judgment and the current of his desires. He had been such a man that he had never doubted where his duty lay, and because he had no other will than to perform it he had been strong and fearless, able to overcome. And now – how to explain it? – something had happened to him. On the gravest occasion of his whole life and ministry his duty suddenly became dark before him, he no longer knew his way, all at once his power to act was inhibited at the source, for he saw the end of every course of action so strangely that it looked at the same time like his duty and a sin. A wicked tyrant, trusting in his own power and the backing of a distant and unjust Law, threatened to let loose upon his people such horrors as scarcely accompanied the course of cruel war – or so it seemed...[125]

It is Sachairi's uncertainty which drives the plot of the novel and defines his relationships with every other character. After the clearance of Glen Luachrach, for example, it transpires that the Factor has, throughout, been engaged in a psychological game with Sachairi; knowing that the anxiety of waiting for *something* to happen would weaken the minister, eventually pushing him to welcome *anything*:

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[124] Ibid., p.41.
[125] Ibid., p.74.

> '...Yonder's a man noo that doesna ken his mind. Noo, says I, if ye lay hand on Glen Loochry, Hell mend him but he'll maybe ken it shune eneuch – and I'm a peacable man d'ye see...I dinna like sodgers and fechtin'. But says I, juist let him a-be a whilie and it's a wonder gin he'll no come till't o'himself". For dae ye ken...there's naething waur nor your mind in two bits, as ye micht say' gaein' twa roads. "Aye" and "No" gaein' roond in your heid.'[126]

The Factor's cruel words reveal another aspect of Mac Colla's conviction in showing the deliberate enactment of divisiveness. It is a speech of great dramatic poise, eliciting sympathy for Sachairi, even as Mac Colla's portrayal of Sachairi's position elicits sympathy for the people of the glen.

Negation and Betrayal

It is clear that the Factor is able to use Sachairi's indecision against the people by ensuring that Sachairi is unable to embolden any resolve against him. The novel analyses the relinquishment of power, and the betrayal of the Gaels by those in positions of power. The absent, 'Anglified' Chieftains turned landowners or improvers; the Government and the Kirk are ranged against them. Sachairi's greatest betrayal is in taking from them their ability to defend themselves and allowing his indecision and doubt to stand in their way. 'They were as bold as lions until they got this religion', Fearchar says to him. 'You have made them entirely dependent on you, so that without you they are helpless. You took the leadership out of my hands. Can your way save them now? God be my witness I would rather they were pagans – aye, even papists – if as you say they would thereby strike more deeply with their roots and be more firmly set to preserve our race in its variety and potency on earth!'[127] Although he rescues them in the opening of the novel, Sachairi's doubt and indecision lead him to betray his congregation through his inaction. The title of the novel itself

[126] Ibid., p.147.
[127] Ibid., p.124.

refers to the betrayal of Christ, and apocalyptic religious imagery is present throughout, as has been noted. But, the idea of betrayal is multi-faceted. C.J.C Stokoe writes that the weight placed on the idea of Sachairi's betrayal is a problem: 'The one weakness of the book to my mind is that there is an implication that had not this betrayal, albeit through genuine motives, taken place the outcome would somehow have been different. Historically speaking I have my doubts on this point.'[128] Stokoe is correct to have doubts on this point, but as an historical novel, the outcome is never in question for the reader. The characters, however, do act and react furiously to such decisions, and are motivated by the belief that the clearance of Gleann Luachrach could possibly be stopped. In this sense, they are possessed by false hope, but this does not mean that for the author, historical events can be changed. Only the reader sees the full picture. The reader witnesses his conflict, but can never be in any serious doubt of the outcome. Unquestioning faith is misplaced, and has led to this end. Sachairi's greatest betrayal of his people is not to abandon them, but to unwittingly lead them to their destruction, as well as his own. Nobody can be saved in this novel and, in an ironic adoption of the predestination which the novel seems to oppose, there is no indication that anything but the clearance of the glen will be the outcome.

After the initial impact of religion, the spirit of the people is broken. The Clearances were always going to be the outcome for a defenceless people, and they are defenceless because of Sachairi: 'The poet Fearchar used to be the master of the valley according to the outstanding position of the poet or "fili" in Celtic tradition. With the arrival of Maighstir Sachairi the poet's power was broken. The valley followed the new leader. The people in the valley were transformed from the brave,

[128] C.J.C Stokoe, 'A Tribute to Fionn Mac Colla', *Scotia* Review, 17 (1977), 22-24, (p.23).

courageous warriors and farmers to weak adherents of Christianity in a "patient and meek spirit."'[129] The betrayal is inherent and established. From the perspective of the reader and with hindsight, from the very title of the novel, there can be no suggestion that anything other than betrayal leading to destruction is possible. It is Sachairi's preaching of predestination and that all are damned, which settles this from the outset, as Fearchar exclaims:

> What use is a religion that bids us tear out our bowels in the here and now of our life for the sake of a heaven where also our humanity will be worthless and covered up, and from which after all we may have been shut out by the decree of God before our birth! A fart for such a faith: a people that got it would be destroyed by it: the Devil must have made it![130]

To impose his will over the people and to assume control over them is the most significant impact Sachairi has on the community. In subsuming their political and cultural system, he makes them reliant upon him and his church, only to be then paralysed by his own indecision drawn from a subjective interpretation of the doctrines of this church over what conclusions to draw from the events as they take place. By positioning the people in his own subjective vision, Sachairi betrays them by not being the leader that he replaced. In this way, their doom is assured from the very moment he assumes control over them.

[129] Schwend, 1990, p. 338-9.
[130] Mac Colla, p.124.

The Psychology of the 'Nay-sayer'

> The natural disposition of Maighstir Sachairi's mind was towards the inhabiting *forms* of its objects. He tended to be little conscious of parts and divisions in the things he saw. What his mind quested was totalities, what it sought to grasp in things was that which made them living and intelligible wholes – that which they were in themselves, not that of which they were composed. And this was so not only when the object was an individual – a tree, a running horse, a mountain – but also when it was formed of a number of single things – as a landscape, with hills, trees, a river, and houses.[131]

Sachairi is an embodiment of the 'nay-sayer' of Mac Colla's philosophy. It is this, behind or underneath Sachairi's religion which is the real focus of Mac Colla's historical study of the causes behind Gaelic's decline in *And the Cock Crew*.

Much critical work on Mac Colla, notably by Gifford, Herdman and Bold, focuses on the presentation of religion in his novels.[132] Though important, this single issue has the potential to stand in the way of greater appreciation of the scope of his writing. Calvinist doctrines are not the main source of conflict in *And the Cock Crew*. More specifically, the commonly acknowledged doctrines of pre-destination, the Elect, and chastisement are not the sole genesis of the ills that befall the people of Gleann Luachrach. Mac Colla's scope is greater than this.

Mac Colla's work attracts criticism of its overwhelmingly Gaelic nature and his political motives, as this thesis has examined. His work has often been considered controversial and, as was demonstrated in chapter two, reviewers frequently objected to his position. Initial comment from the period, however, whether on *The Albannach* in the 1930s or on *And the Cock Crew* in the 1940s did not focus on anti-Presbyterian

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[131] Mac Colla, p.26.
[132] See Morrison, 1973,
Gifford et al, 2002,
Gifford, '*Move Up, John*', *Books in Scotland*, 50 (1994), 1-7.
Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', *Cencrastus*, 13 (1983), pp. 11-13.
Bold, Alan, 'Mac Colla Yes, Knox No', in *Scotia Review*, ed. by David Morrison, 10 (1975), pp. 26-29.

bias. Mac Colla has been subjected to varying interpretations through the decades, and the position he occupies as a firebrand, and an 'embarrassment' to more moderate nationalists, developed after Gaelic ceased to be his main focus of attention. [133] With the publication of *And the Cock Crew*, his reputation seemed to be taking good shape:

> Fionn MacColla's long silence since the publication of his striking first novel *The Albannach* has provoked speculation. Too often in Scotland's history an initial brilliance has failed to sustain itself. With the appearance of his second novel, however, such speculation is agreeably dispelled. This new work, dealing with the tragic climax in the Highland Clearances of Gaeldom's way of life, is marked by great concentration and beauty. MacColla is a real writer, he has a sureness and maturity which are likely to carry him into the very first rank of Scottish novelists…his writing has none of the immaturities and longeurs that visit some of Gibbon's work; the intellectual power is greater, the issues more profound. The psychological understanding and observation is throughout admirable, and a climactic encounter between his central character Maighstir Sachairi and Fearchar the Poet is handled with genius.[134]

Calvinism is only one manifestation of the psychology that Mac Colla discusses. Religious doctrines and their strict observance are the embodiment of a psychology which can be seen in a number of different creeds. Edwin Muir, for example, makes such comparisons in his essay: 'Bolshevism and Calvinism'(1934):

> …In content these two creeds are quite dissimilar, but in logical structure they are astonishingly alike…the water-tight system, the determinism assuring ultimate victory, the practical and realistic temper, the unity of aim rejecting everything which lies beyond its scope – literature for instance – the direction of that aim towards the advancement of a chosen class, the rigid internal discipline: all these things follow self-evidently from one another. The water-tight system proceeds naturally from the possession of a central scripture, the determinism assuring certainty of success proceeds as naturally from the infallibility of that system, and so in turn with the practical temper and the unified aim and all the rest…The type of man who produces and is in turn reproduced by such theories is well known to us in history from such figures as William the Silent, Cromwell and Knox. His virtues, with the exception of his central virtue of faith, from which all the others spring, are almost exclusively practical. He is admirably fitted to accomplish political, economic or religious changes in the objective body of society; he is often masterly in dealing with affairs and institutions, with objects in general. He accepts institutions simply as institutions and asks: how can they be made better, more

[133] Murray and Tait, 1984, p.56.
[134] R. Crombie Saunders, 'And the Cock Crew', *Scottish Arts and Letters*, 2, (1946), p. 60.

> rational, more in accordance with sound theory? He does not generally foresee the suffering which is caused by his changes, and when it appears he refuses to admit its justification. So after revolution comes repression tempered by education, for the same virtues which enabled him to direct the change now compel him to master its consequences. The Calvinist type, in general, has a less than normal capacity for living. He creates conditions that can only remain endurable by a sustained perseverance in action at the expense of living.[135]

Mac Colla takes attitudes like these to represent the status quo in Scotland since the Reformation and adapts them to his own arguments. He wants an independent nation, so he argues that opposition to this is fundamentally ideological, and that such ideology stems from the psychological alignment to an opposition of all the elements which he himself supports. Mac Colla was not raised as a Catholic, and he taught himself Gaelic. His nationalism grew from experiences in the Independent Labour Party, as discussed in chapter one.[136] Essentially though, for Mac Colla these issues were supplementary to the basic 'yea' versus 'nay' psychologies, and any attempts to dismiss his own position as simply sectarian opposition are inadequate. He became a Catholic because he believed that it invested in a *positive* philosophy. He taught himself Gaelic because it represented positive individuality, and he supported nationalism for the same reason.

As a believer in a 'watertight system', Sachairi oppressively opposes, and re-educates the people to stand against Fearchar's 'paganism'. The passage quoted at the beginning of this section shows that Sachairi does not allow the world around him to

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[135] Edwin Muir, 'Bolshevism and Calvinism', in *Uncollected Scottish Criticism* ed. by Andrew Noble, (London: Vision and Barnes and Noble, 1982), 123-30, (pp.125-7).

[136] John MacCormick, in his memoir *The Flag in the Wind* noted his own feelings on the matter: 'Ever since the days of Keir Hardie the I.L.P was committed to support that proposal (Home Rule). Many of the Party's best-known speakers were professed believers in the need for a Scottish Parliament. Men like Tom Johnston, the late Rev. James Barr, James Maxton and many others … even Ramsay MacDonald himself had in his early days been Secretary of a London Scottish Home Rule Association … As the years went on and as positions of power and influence opened up to them, they gradually forgot their Scottish sentiment and like so many other Scotsmen of their time concentrated their energies in a Party loyalty which far transcended national considerations' (MacCormick, 1955, pp. 14-15).

be reflective of affirmations which would negate his own self-evident creeds. Mac Colla expands this at great length in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* and this 'psychological pathology' is his central focus. Sachairi's iron will denies him the reason to accept any 'effulgence' of other 'beings' or objects. Psychologically, as Mac Colla presents it, such affirmation would undermine Sachairi's 'possession of a central scripture', to use Muir's words, which in this context defers to Predestination and the notion of Man as totally reprobate, with Earth and life to be endured and accepted as punishments. 'Opposition' is, by nature, repressive and in this context it is wielded alongside oppressive systems of power, whether religious, political or otherwise. Mac Colla also believed it was saturated by Pride:

> The reason for the rejecting action on the part of a *being*, "I," is simple, like every event at this level. *Beings* are of all magnitudes, like stars. Inevitably therefore many overshadow or alternatively – outshine others. Surrounded by other *beings* as such, therefore, the *being*, "I," is confronted with their magnitude or brilliance – very, very often their *greater* magnitude or brilliance – has to be affirmed – or rejected. The Nay-say or negation, the refusal to embrace at the level of *being,* to merge and be interpenetrated, occurs when a *being*, "I," confronted with a *being* of greater magnitude or brilliance, experiences that magnitude or brilliance not as a matter for affirmation or ontological embrace, but as a diminution of the "I," as involving the burden of a comparison not to be borne; and to free itself from what it experiences as an intolerable diminution, rejects the magnitude or refuses the effulgence.[137]

Because Man is inherently wicked, depraved and sinful, any 'effulgence' which is perceived by Man must also be such and therefore denied 'existence', or be willed into 'non-being' by the negator.

Mac Colla traces this psychological attitude's greatest triumph to the Reformation in Scotland. As he writes in 'The Valve' in *Catalyst*, 1970: 'Centuries of the universal imposition of the doctrine meant that, as it was intended to mean, that the radically negating *attitude* penetrated and percolated right through the personality,

[137] Mac Colla, 1967, p.119-20.

right down to the subconscious roots of motivation.'[138] The 'negating' attitude and its influence over the 'subconscious roots of motivation' is presented in *And the Cock Crew* when Sachairi eventually accepts the impending Clearance as pre-determined, after a 'vision', described as a 'Simultaneous' experience, at Fearchar's house:

> …In the light of that moment, that Simultaneous, he saw this that was coming and must come *as if it had been already past*. And therefore it could no longer appear before him as something about which he must decide or act. There was hereafter no acting or deciding, not even submission – only acceptance, acceptance. It was no longer something from outside approaching; but something which he had already experienced and was experiencing, interiorly. It was nothing either that he knew his own fate was not elsewhere or in other times or places, but bound to its consummation here. All that was or was to be, whether God smote to the uttermost or in His mercy still spared some, whether he himself died or lived – all that was equal now, all gathered and lifted up together in one, Thy will be done![139]

The urgency of circumstance eventually absolves Sachairi's responsibility and he reverts to the psychologically euphoric 'satisfaction' of his doctrine. He retreats to the securities of his 'watertight system'. This revelation alleviates him of the guilt which is manifest through his uncertainties. He is plagued by human sympathy, but he relents at this moment in favour of the familiar: predestination. This psychological reliance on the doctrine falls into what Mac Colla considered a conditioned response to such challenges or uncertainties and he develops this further in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, comparing it to Communism:

> The effect of the doctrine, identically with the effect of the Reformation doctrine of Total Reprobation, is to free the *being*, "I," absolutely from all obligations towards or recognition of its being overshadowed in the total area of *beings,* not "I." That is the wonderfully liberating effect of the doctrine – *freedom not to have to acknowledge*. By the doctrine of the total reprobation of non-Communist society the Communist is at one stroke set free from the past, equally from the present insofar as it is not Communist. The essence is not in the objective truth of the doctrine as an account of history but in the radical inward liberation which accompanies it and which he shares in identical sort and degree with the reprobating sixteenth century Protestant.

[138] Fionn Mac Colla, 'The Valve', *Catalyst for the Scottish Viewpoint*, 3.1 (1970), 14-15, (p.15).
[139] Mac Colla, 1995, p.133.

> Furthermore, as with the Protestant, it is the desire of or impulse towards such a liberation, however subconsciously it is present and at work, which is the *cause* of his conscious "recognition" of the "truth" of the doctrine. He immediately "recognises the "truth" of a doctrine which at one stroke sets him free of all obligation to every overshadowing reality or "other" whether of the present or the past…[140]

It is this 'negating' attitude which is at the core of *And the Cock Crew.* For Mac Colla, the negating attitude inspired the Reformation. It was not born from it.

In *And the Cock Crew* Mac Colla used his literary art to present his political convictions. *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* is the fiercest and most representative explication of these convictions, and *The Free Man* most obviously gathers his arguments. In a letter written to J.L. Broom, though, Mac Colla articulates a personal and direct statement of these ideas:

> …Nay-say will destroy human societies - & individuals too: the acid of a person's hate or Nay-saying may well generate some fell condition even in his own physical being of which he might well perish – I believe many may well do. (Sanctity = sanity = health). What destroyed Scotland, I seemed at last to perceive, was a movement of negation or Nay-saying, universally instigated & maintained throughout century after century – by Kirk & school, of course, it must be said. It was inevitable, as I see it. 'Sin (ie. Nay say) when it is finished bringeth forth death.' The end of Nay-say is, simply, Nothing. Scotland *had* to go, & all its arts & culture: because these could only have been maintained & nourished by a prevailing movement of affirmation or Yea-say in personalities & the imposed attitude was the precise contrary. It's not a question of 'Catholics and Protestants' & wha was richt? All that is purely superficial & unhelpful. The Nay-say is endemic in all human nature; we all have a tendency to fall into it, & often do fall into it, all the time – it's 'sin' in us if you care to risk such a term.[141]

In examining The Clearances in a novel, Mac Colla uses history as a medium through which he is able to develop and present his theories on the human psychological condition as it affects contemporary Scotland. In 'The Valve' he writes: 'Contrary to their human impulse, the Scots have been "programmed" to say no to life…'[142] This,

[140] Mac Colla, 1967, p.154.
[141] Fionn Mac Colla, 'Scots Nay-Saying', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 2.1, (1984) pp. 69-71.
[142] Mac Colla, 1970, p.15.

he believed, had been entrenched through the Reformation, creating a 'dualism' in the collective Scottish mind: 'Some obscure but nonetheless deep-seated and fundamental split or division has long been the particular note of Scotland and everything in Scottish life.'[143] Mac Colla believed that this psychological attitude was still the root cause behind a lack of collective unity: a split or division in the nation. However, as we have seen with the comparisons drawn between Bolshevism and Communism, this is not to say that the Scots are distinctively prone to extremism or division more than any other people. Mac Colla's books trace the manifestations of this through Scottish history. The Reformation and the Clearances are examples of this *means* of division. In his own time, Mac Colla saw the negativity in an opposition to Scottish Independence. In his novels and in the politically motivated writing for *The Free Man*, he described the obstruction of independence in the twentieth century, and the rapid decline of Scottish Gaelic, as the latest indications of this particular 'national' psychological conflict. In identifying the presence of the 'bringer-down' in modern Scotland at least, he was not alone. Hamish Henderson, for example, writes: 'It is characteristic of Scotland that when anyone in this country attempts anything large and sensational, no matter how first-rate the project is, the whole nation becomes loud in discouragement and disparagement.'[144] These are words which have special resonance with regard to Mac Colla and his own literary career.

The End of The Gaelic Experience?

Mac Colla's later work scrutinises the effects of the Reformation in Scotland and after *And the Cock Crew* this begins to take over from Gaelic as his central focus. The negative psychological influences in *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* are

[143] Ibid., p.14.
[144] Timothy Neat, *Hamish Henderson: A Biography. Volume 1. The Making of a Poet (1919-1953)*, (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007), p. 207.

themes in these books because they are impositions upon or obstructions to what he considered to be a naturally affirming experience. This obsession with negative theological psychology began as a concern for the state of Gaelic. The exploration of the human psyche and the 'pathological condition' or 'negating attitude' as it applies in human conflict are the major themes of his two great novels. The fate of Gaelic in Scotland and the loss of independence are central to this concept. 'I am concerned with a condition …that concerns persons who actually have felt no constriction in their nature and activities from negations and prohibitions originating in the Protestant philosophy of life – simply because their will is so totally assimilated to them. A pathological condition: constriction has become their freedom: real freedom has withered into the inconceivable, certainly the undesired and undesirable.'[145] Mac Colla dismissed such people as Gnyaffs[146]: '…The Negator, the puller-down, who is of course in all of us…'[147] who is not free – and does not wish to be. His attitude towards the 'negator' transcended religion and politics and Gaelic. It was this psychology which he saw as the ultimate obstacle.

The absence of unity is the symptom of the damaged Scottish psyche and nation. It was this, Mac Colla believed, that: '…illustrates *the* basic fact about Scotland – the presence in every aspect of its life of *some radical inner contradiction*; throughout the whole of Scottish life one thing is inescapably evident, *something is at war with something*. And if in Scottish life, then…in the inner world or psyche of the Scots as human persons.'[148]

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[145] Mac Colla, 1975, p.8.
[146] Herdman recalls in *Poets, Pubs, Polls and Pillar Boxes*, p21, that ' "Gnyaff" was one of Tom's favourite words and he found himself perpetually beleaguered by this species, which he believed to be always vigilantly on the alert to frustrate him and put him down because of its instinctive hostility to his innate distinction of mind and impressive personal appearance.'
[147] Mac Colla in Morrison, 1973, p.18.
[148] Mac Colla, 1970, p.15.

Mac Colla traced ascendancy of this negative psychology to the negating social doctrines which gained control and influence after the Reformation, but the deep-seated psychological effects – the radically negating attitude – continued in Scottish society, culture and politics. Mac Colla saw this *attitude*, if not its embodiment (in religion and politics), as continuously relevant in Scotland. By placing it in a historical context in *And the Cock Crew*, Mac Colla invested the novel with a contemporary political and cultural relevance. By setting this Scottish conflict in the Highland Clearances, he was relating the impact of this attitude on Gaelic, which in turn, was to have significant impact on any future independence of the Scottish people. The negating attitude 'remained in control of all of us, Scots, even after the doctrine *as* a doctrine had lost its conviction, even after it had been forgotten – even, indeed, when it was consciously repudiated.'[149]

Gaelic and independence still define Mac Colla's Scotland. His constant battle was to struggle with being morally and intellectually justified – an upholder of the 'yea' philosophy – and still be frustrated and on the 'losing' side of history. *And the Cock Crew* is the greatest example of this struggle in Mac Colla's work, but his polemical essays often sum up the complicated, serious and pessimistic situation directly:

> The whole ghastly business, the death pangs of a nation atrociously protracted throughout precisely four hundred years, has been the effect of a continuous conflict in Scottish human nature between two radically opposite responses to life, that of affirmation, the radical positive, and that of negation, with victory continuously assured to the latter because of our centuries-long continuous conditioning.[150]

The final word on *And the Cock Crew* though, should go to the character of Fearchar. Once again, hindsight applies here. From outside the novel, it is possible to

[149] Mac Colla, 1970, p.15.
[150] Ibid.

view the great contributions that writers like Fionn Mac Colla made to the nationalist movement when it was in its infancy. The negative tone through which *And the Cock Crew* is presented is a reflection of the immediate post-war period; it is not the end of the story. The contemporary relevance that Mac Colla presents in *And the Cock Crew* has been demonstrated here with reference to the 'Cùis na Cànain' articles. Fearchar, though, embodies Mac Colla's political force which transcends this: he is the catalyst for the sympathetic insight such as Mac Colla himself employs as a novelist in his depiction of Sachairi. But he is also an embodiment of an ingrained movement in Scottish society whose very presence is cultural, historical and political: although the Clearances were a defining moment for Gaelic, Fearchar the poet's refusal to submit, the cogency and force of his argument, both moral *and* intellectual, is the positive embodiment of Mac Colla's own argument, which although marginalised in its expression through the exiled poet who exists on the fringes of his society, nevertheless survives the clearance, whereas the embodiment of the 'nay-sayer' does not.

Conclusion

This thesis has been the first major reassessment of Mac Colla's first two novels and places his work within the context of the period in which he was writing. In doing this, it has been necessary to examine the familial, cultural, and historical influences on Mac Colla's work. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, it has not been possible to examine the entire corpus of Mac Colla's work, but it has been demonstrated that Mac Colla's work did shift focus, from the optimistic and radical affirmations of his first novel, to the emergence of a polemical voice which prompted the examination, through dialectical arguments, of human psychology. It has been established in this thesis that Mac Colla's arguments are more complex than has hitherto been acknowledged. Much of the criticism of Mac Colla has been directed at his overall work has been unfairly coloured by misinterpretations of his agenda and message. The influence of Gaelic permeates the cultural, political and historical foundations of his two major novels, but through this promotion he has been misrepresented variously as anti-English, or that his own opinions on religion prompted him to attack the Reformation: 'MacColla is angry and savage in his shrill hatred of all things English and his denunciation of the role of the reformed church in Scottish history'.[151] As has been established here, Mac Colla's stance was more complex than this. He has been portrayed by critics such as Isobel Murray as a firebrand, and afforded little critical attention outside what has been examined in this thesis. This thesis has, for the first time, noted the limitations of such criticism and concludes that, through a lack of in-depth examination of his influences, his time and his personal history, his message of affirming national and cultural identity has been neglected.

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[151] Gifford et al, 2002, p.714.

Re-examining Mac Colla's output in the political and literary context of the period has established that his writing still carries important sociological, political and cultural relevance in Scotland today. Throughout his life, Mac Colla lived in a Scotland in which there was little to no political autonomy, and the Gaelic language, which he considered to be the most tangible example of independence, steadily declined through a combination of government action and inaction. His writing, particularly in *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* is a comprehensive examination of the psychological condition which developed in this society. There is anger in much of what he writes, but it is born from frustration and conceived from a position of radical political and cultural defence.

The Scottish Parliament was reconvened less than a century after Mac Colla's birth. Scotland has moved into a different era. Although the arguments which Mac Colla discusses in his work have modernised, the purpose remains, fundamentally, the same. At the time of writing, the Scottish National Party has returned as a majority Scottish government; a referendum on Scottish independence is to follow in the years to come. Will the cultural landscape change with it, in the way that Mac Colla had argued that it must? Contemporary thought in Scotland is increasingly considering the questions that Mac Colla was arguing nearly a century ago:

> The idea that Scotland is reborn is tempered by the fear that that it is always on the brink of collapse. While this feeling has never been more amplified than now, this anxiety seems to have magnified in the last 10 years. The idea that cultural renascence in Scotland has (or will) coincide with its political devolution is tempered by the insinuation that devolution will be its undoing. Much of this anxiety stems from the feeling that art in Scotland still can't be considered separately from the British context; Scottish culture has a symbiotic relationship with British statecraft. The British imaginary mediates how culture is reproduced at home (in Scotland *and* in Britain) and abroad.[152]

[152] Neil Mulholland, 'The Challenge of Scottish Cultural Self-Determination', in *Radical Scotland: Arguments for Self-Determination*, ed. by Gerry Hassan and Rosie Ilett (Edinburgh: Luath, 2011), 198-210, (p.198).

Here, Neil Mulholland highlights an important point with reference to both this thesis and Mac Colla's work, when he suggests that the 'feeling that Scotland or Scottish culture is on the brink of collapse has never been more amplified than now', but Mulholland writes about a different Scotland, and a different Scottish culture, to that of Mac Colla. Mac Colla constantly argued that this condition was urgent throughout his own life. This thesis has shown that this concern was demonstrated most emphatically in *The Free Man* articles and *And the Cock Crew*. The idea that devolution could be Scotland's 'undoing' is precisely why Mac Colla resigned from the NPS in 1933, as detailed in chapter three. His two major novels remain important refutations of Mulholland's final point here, that 'The British imaginary mediates how culture is reproduced at home'. Mac Colla's purpose as a writer in the early twentieth century was to draw attention to the very scenario that Mulholland writes about in 2011. He forewarns against precisely this throughout *The Free Man* articles, 'Scotland's Share of Guilt' and 'The Psychology of the Anglophile' to name two, and his novels depict it as already happening to Gaelic Scotland in the 1920s as the condition of a story that had been running since at least the Highland Clearances.

This reassessment of Mac Colla's work has demonstrated that his purpose and his argument with regard to Scotland are still contemporary. A study of his work reveals the same passions of ideological opposition which are recognisable in the similar arguments of today. In 2007, Duncan Glen wrote:

> When in May 2007 Alex Salmond, of the Scottish National Party, became First Minister of the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood, the Scottish National Party had for many years been unrecognisable as the party of poets and other so-called unworldly romantics who inspired the national movement from the 1920s. At this historic time it is surely appropriate to remember the writers without whose up-front involvement in politics there would be no Holyrood Parliament.[153]

[153] Glen, 2007, p.22.

Mac Colla and his contemporaries were not the recognised 'Scottish Snellmans' of their age, but their work contributes to the creative foundations of an emerging independent Scotland. Throughout this thesis, there has been an emphasis on Mac Colla's relationships: with his family, his peers, with Scotland and Gaelic itself. All of these relationships have been discussed here only as they relate to his work, but the period in which he was writing was politically charged for all Scotland's major writers and it was inhabited by cultural thinkers:

> In the 1920s Compton Mackenzie was an active nationalist and at a by-election of 1933 Eric Linklater stood unsuccessfully as a nationalist candidate for East Fife. More quietly, Neil Gunn also supported the nationalist movement. Thomas Douglas MacDonald, who wrote his novels as Fionn MacColla, was a committed nationalist and his writings remain politically influential especially in Gaelic-speaking areas.[154]

The people of the Gaelic-speaking areas of which Glen writes would always be the most likely to respond to Mac Colla's message, and his focus on this demographic is clearly demonstrated through the nationalist propaganda with which he was engaged in the 1920s and 30s. His early reviews have received a great deal of attention in this thesis, in order to highlight that even those who criticised his work for cultural reasons, or became involved in spats with him, may have found themselves more or less in alignment with him politically. In a personal letter to me, Duncan Glen wrote that: 'sadly … there is little written by Scottish critics that does not have a core that is personal – whether for or against a writer and his work.'[155] It seems that much the same could be said of Scottish and British politics. The politics of these 'Gaelic-speaking areas' has long been at odds with the Anglocentric mainstream of British politics. Mac Colla brought this opposition to the wider public, outside of traditionally Gaelic-speaking areas.

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[154] Glen, 2007, p.26.
[155] Personal letter from Duncan Glen, 16 April, 2008.

This thesis has demonstrated Mac Colla's Gaelic 'credentials' in order to establish his personal position, which was represented in his novels. In chapter one, the genealogical study presents Mac Colla's history in the context of his own understanding of the influence and importance of history across generations. His personal connections to the Highland Clearances, uncovered for the first time in this thesis, are tangible examples of the ideas about 'knowing' history through the experience of previous generations, which inspired his life and his work. This sentiment has been carried through each chapter, the result of which has been a presentation of the development of Mac Colla's ideas, from their origins to their final explosion in *And the Cock Crew*. The direction he took to begin with, in *The Albannach*, was characterised by youthful optimism. Despite its grim social urban and rural realism, the tone of Mac Colla's early optimism for the future of his nation is there. This is evident also in his involvement in radical cultural politics during the entire period in which it was being written. This was a cultural radicalism that neither Gunn nor Gibbon, not even MacDiarmid, could fully embrace because of its otherness, centred in the Gaelic language, its history and contemporary manifestation.

In chapter two, *The Albannach* was examined through an attention to the radical affirmation of personal politics and personal history that Mac Colla inculcates in Murdo Anderson. It is this origin that wore out in his later work, but it is clear that Mac Colla's original cultural message was dynamic and ultimately affirming, and also a direct challenge both to the stereotypical and unrealistic representations of the Gaidhealtachd in literature to that point, and to the status quo of the British political system. This thesis has discussed how Mac Colla set out to take issue with the representation of the Gaidhealtachd in literature. Although Mac Colla gently took issue with Neil Munro's depictions, Gifford contends that the revision Mac Colla

brought with him was only possible through Munro's own advance: 'Without Munro's subtle amendments to the historical perspectives of Scott and Stevenson, significant revision of the way we read the Highlands could have taken much longer. The misty ground of false Highland mythology had begun to be cleared …'.[156] In the hands of Mac Colla, this was a leap into the twentieth century where, for the first time, the Gael in his true, unflattering social condition emerged. It was a condition that was not to universal taste. As the presentation of the negative criticism of the period demonstrates, Mac Colla's position was misinterpreted as an attack on the Gaels and the Highlands. Through the context of *The Albannach*'s themes, however, this criticism is revealed to be an opposition to Mac Colla's subject matter, politics and attitude, and in the case of J. MacNair Reid's article 'A Pig's Eyes in Alba', a personal attack. By analysing Mac Colla's first novel through the contexts of the approaches to history and culture which influenced his politics and his writing, it has been demonstrated that he was unique and primary among his peers in his presentation of the twentieth-century Gael as culturally disaffected and politically angry. *The Albannach* marked the Gael as re-imagined and modernised. Mac Colla tackled misrepresentation directly and created a Gaelic discourse which represented Gaelic society's calamity.

This thesis has acknowledged that Mac Colla was often outspoken in his views, but has sought to correct misinterpretation of his overall agenda through careful consideration of his motivations and influences. Its purpose has also been to demonstrate that the outspoken element of his work developed gradually, though ultimately broke free of any balance which had existed between extolling the positive affirmations of a Gaelic identity and criticising the attitudes and corrupted systems

[156] Gifford et al, 2002, p.326.

which he saw as restricting national autonomy through the suppression of cultural individuality. In chapter three, the origins of this break have been established through the examination of the articles he wrote for *The Free Man*. During this period between *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* Mac Colla was demonstrating that only a people who considered themselves culturally or psychologically independent would be able to achieve a tangible political independence. His argument is a deeper contrast to the view that there is more which unites the nations of the United Kingdom, linguistically and culturally, than divides them. Mac Colla discussed the intellectual approach to cultural independence in the article 'Johann Wilhelm Snellman', for example, to demonstrate the necessity of a unique national identity, formed around unique cultural identity, maintaining throughout his time at *The Free Man* that the decline in an indigenous Scottish language was the result of political union, a union which did not naturally develop from homogeny but was forced. *The Free Man* articles show that Mac Colla's arguments are historical and cultural, but they are also contemporary arguments for independence through their promotion of a freedom of individuality, and they demonstrate a connection between his cultural reasoning and his emerging Catholic faith. For Mac Colla, the denial of this cultural independence was equal to the limitation of potential; he argued that individuality was inherently a positive affirmation, that its promotion did not limit 'progress', but would facilitate a full Scottish interaction with Europe and the world, as he demonstrates in 'Scots put to Shame'. However, the arguments in *The Free Man* articles also demonstrate his growing anger, through frustration, at the lack of momentum of this direction. His attentions turned towards the examination of psychology as is demonstrated in 'The Psychology of the Anglophile'. He began to draw comparisons between the state of mind which opposed his own ideas and the psychology of

opposition, or negation, itself. A study of *The Free Man* articles establishes Mac Colla's development as a writer, but it also identifies the burgeoning appearance of the fierce intellectual arguments which came to dominate his later work. The promotion of Gaelic as a cultural affirmation began to make way for the defence of Gaelic through increasingly polemical debate.

Political and cultural connections between Gaelic and the movement for Scottish independence, as they exist in Mac Colla's work, have also been discussed at length in this thesis. It has been necessary to establish these connections because they existed outside his work, not only in his life but also through the people of the Scotland he inhabited. The evidence from the 1920s and 1930s, established here through Mac Colla's interactions with An Comun Gaidhealach and Annie Johnstone of Barra, demonstrates that educated Gaels were not only committed to sustaining their native Gaelic language – in the same way that Snellman and his compatriots had been in Finland – but that the commitment to Scottish independence was on the political agenda, fully symbiotic with cultural regeneration.

In chapter four *And the Cock Crew* is not considered as a critical attack on Calvinism, but on doctrinal ideology itself, as it applies to any dominating, or revolutionary system of thought. Mac Colla had lived through the period of the Russian Revolution and the First World War; by the time *And the Cock Crew* was being written, the Nazis were in power in Germany. The recent history of Scotland and Britain justified the rejection of the authoritarian systems of power and Empire for Mac Colla as a Gael; *And the Cock Crew* places all of this within the context of the Clearances. A careful consideration of Mac Colla's work shows that his criticisms of Protestantism, or the Reformation, are not sectarian, but anti-establishment. Sachairi does not fail the people of Gleann Luachrach because he is a minister. Mac

Colla focused on the psychological condition, on the closed and bitter mind of Man, and the constructed systems which opposed individuality, which corrupted a victim like Sachairi. This thesis rejects the notion that the novel is an attack on the Reformation and the kirk. Like Edwin Muir, Mac Colla saw similarities in political systems such as Communism.

It is worth noting the words of Ned Thomas in *The Welsh Extremist*: 'Sometimes the British state is directly hostile to our separate life … sometimes it can be manipulated in our favour, but it never belongs to us.'[157] It is from a cognate perspective that Mac Colla's own attitudes inspired the sentiment in *And the Cock Crew* and explored the Highland Clearances as the darkest example of the Gael's 'otherness' within the British state. As he demonstrates in the urgent politics of *The Free Man* articles 'Cùis na Cànain' and again in the conversation between Fearchar and Sachairi in *And the Cock Crew*, he had begun to explore opposing and negative psychologies. John Herdman says that, in his later work, Mac Colla felt the need to appear wholly objective so as not to be dismissed as a sectarian writer and that this led to his work losing some of its artistic exuberance.[158] There is always an agenda with Mac Colla, and it is difficult to believe that he was seriously convinced that any attempt at objectivity in such loaded historical fiction could possibly succeed; as such, while these traits are noticeable in *And the Cock Crew*, objectivity is not a prominent feature of this novel. *And the Cock Crew*, through its depiction of a historical turning point, is fiercer, and angrier than *The Albannach*. It represents Mac Colla's own struggle: the Clearances had to be dealt with, because they represented such turmoil for Gaelic Scotland, but through this engagement the positive affirmations of cultural regeneration which stimulated *The Albannach* would be irretrievably lost to the

[157] Thomas, 1971, p.70.
[158] Herdman, 1983, pp.11-13.

darkness of human psychology in *And the Cock Crew*. In this respect, at least, Mac Colla adopted an increasingly negative attitude with regard to his subject matter. The anger, strain, frustration and bitterness of *And the Cock Crew* are a human drama set in chaos, but Mac Colla had to sacrifice the affirmations of *The Albannach* in order to fully explore the contemporary Gaidhealtachd and Scotland.

In his poem, 'Shall Gaelic Die' (1969) Iain Crichton Smith defines a fundamental relevance in the language that Mac Colla had also identified nearly forty years earlier:

> He who loses his language loses his world.
> The highlander who loses
> his language loses his world.
> The space ship that goes astray among the planets loses the world.[159]

The necessity of language in a distinctive culture is central in Gaelic identity. The recognition noted in Mac Colla's novels, and in Iain Crichton Smith's poem, also leads to the kind of discussion which may help to bring about something Mac Colla himself recognised as worth fighting for. The novels retain their value as literary work. It is also now conceivable that they have served, and continue to serve, in the struggle towards a social, cultural and political reality that extends beyond the literary world in which Mac Colla has been an undervalued master.

[159] Iain Crichton Smith, *Selected Poems* (Midlothian: Macdonald Publishers, 1981) pp. 135-142.

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